

A RECOVERY READER

A GUIDE FOR SPONSORS, STUDENTS & TEACHERS



SELECTED WRITINGS FROM
60 YEARS
OF 12-STEP RELATED
ARTICLES, ESSAYS, &
PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

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A Recovery Reader

**Studies in AA, the Steps and
the Process of the Program**

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*Portions of this book have been reprinted in Sponsor Magazine.
sponsormagazine.org*

WARNING: Travel beyond this point without a Sponsor is not advised.

Intent of This Book

This book is intended to be used:

- a) to serve as a personal enrichment course-in-a-book on Recovery and AA History.
- b) for a Sponsor who shares this information with someone they are attempting to help.
- c) to create a new class as appropriate to your area's needs and opportunity by taking the suggestions and materials to assemble or revise as you see fit.

It is not presented as the "only" way to do the work of sharing the Program, but is synthesis of work by over thirty authors over the past half century plus of effective AA recovery.

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Spirituality

“Having had a spiritual awakening as ***the*** result of this program...”

From Step 12

The Spiritual Awakening is the ONLY result of the Twelve Step program of recovery. The restoration of health, happiness, belonging, character, and material possessions are reflections of our acceptance of this life-changing gift.

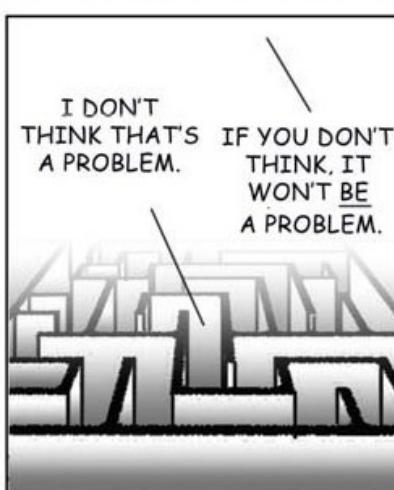
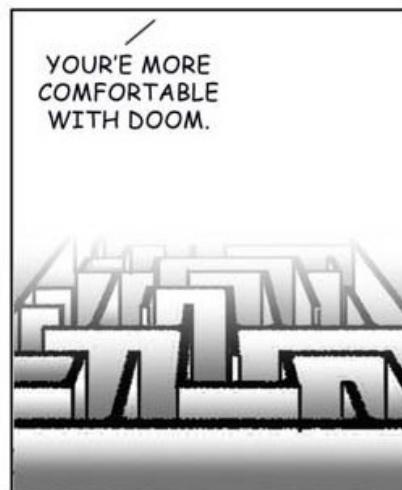
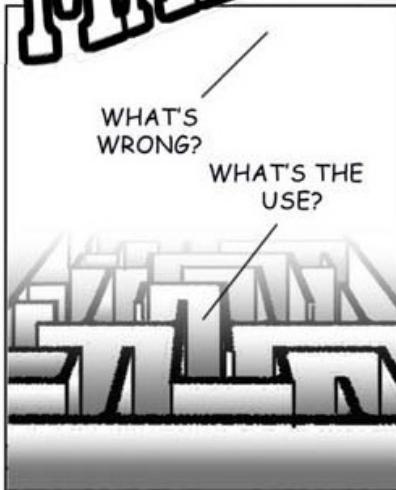
This is the most personal aspect of Recovery. Each member of Recovery has a slightly different personal way of describing it, living it, and sharing it, but they all reflect “THE Result.”

These articles are offered to help achieve and sustain this personal experience and surrender to our Spiritual way of life.

MAZEING RECOVERY

DOOM

BY JOE A.



Steps 10 and 11

The steps are structured to provide recognition of our problem (alcoholism and the spiritual poverty that accompanies that disease), and the corrective measures to heal our past as far as humanly possible.

Beyond the humanly possible we turn to our spiritual life as an everyday reality. Whether clothed in the official structure of an established religion, or the method of moral living dictated by another sense of authority, we change our approach to daily life to live on a spiritual basis.

A basic definition of “spiritual” is given elsewhere, but it does no good to do the work of Steps 1 through 9 if we do not proceed to live in “a design for living that really works.”

The articles in this section are intended to help you with your ongoing spiritual growth and not as an indoctrination into an “authorized” spirituality.

When AA began, its members were all Christian. With the publication of the Big Book and the change of wording to allow for “God as you understand God,” or “A Higher Power,” Recovery has been expanded into every known religion and school of moral thought.

Standing with Christians in our meetings we have sober Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, native beliefs, and organized schools on non-belief.

Those who have not settled the question of religion within their alcoholic haze find that they can first focus on the simplicity of not picking up one drink one day at a time and following the direction of the people who arrived before them.

They may jump through the “religion” hoop later, or they may not. They can still remain sober.

Even Atheists and Antitheists stay sober provided they recognize their sobriety as a consequence of a power greater than themselves. For some, this has been the fellowship of AA – the dozens of men and women they encounter who can do what the new person cannot do – stay sober!

It is the purpose of the following section to help expand your Recovery by exercising the steps in your daily practice of spiritual growth and interaction with the people of this world.

Forgiveness – The Missing Step

This is a discussion of forgiveness. First, we point out, as if you didn't already know, that alcoholics tend to feel victimized by people, places, things, and the cosmos in general. As if this were not enough, we alcoholics also carry a grudge about what has been done to us or not done for us.

In the paragraphs that follow, we explore the implications of carrying resentments around with us. If we cannot get rid of our resentments any other way, we are sometimes faced with the ultimate resentment eradication tool – to forgive those whom we resent. The nature of forgiveness is investigated, and finally, techniques to achieve forgiveness are presented. Our discussion of forgiveness is elaborated upon through links into four additional pages below. It is best, we think, that they be viewed in the order listed.

Alcoholics are Resentment –Prone

Most alcoholics have a deep (almost pathological) sense of justice. If we are wronged (meaning often that we did not get what we wanted) or if we even conjure up the notion that we might have been wronged, we find full *justification* to express anger or harbor resentment. It then seems almost a duty to carry a justified resentment. Otherwise, those who have wronged us would get off scot-free. And that wouldn't be right, would it? So, we waste our God-given lives judging and punishing our fellows. Relinquishing a justified resentment is one of the most difficult experiences known to the alcoholic.

If you explore the origins of the resentment word in our dictionary your will find:

Resent has also been used in other senses that seem strange to us, such as “to feel pain” or “to perceive by smell.” The thread that ties the senses together is the notion of feeling or perceiving. Again.

For the alcoholic, resentment is a reliving of the offense that injured us in the first place. Think about it. We perceive that we are punishing that person for their wrong, when in fact, we are simply willing ourselves to feel the hurt again, and again, and again. Get the point? Resenting makes no more sense than our drinking did. Something is twisted in brainsville, we think.

Methods of Resentment Removal

How are resentments removed? Here are the customary methods and they are presented in increasing order of difficulty (to the alcoholic, that is):

Neglect. Yes, benign neglect removes most of our thoughts of the day. We simply forget about things that are not important to us. As we grow in our sobriety we are less interested in harboring resentments and they follow a natural order of elimination, unless they are captured by our perverse habits.

Reflection. If we are aware of our resentment and, if we wish to get rid of it, we are wise to think about it.

Did we really hear what the other person said? Did they really say what they meant? Was what we heard just a rumor? Does the offending action fit a pattern, or might it have been a fluke? Was the offender in distress? Are we giving this person the benefit of the doubt? If not, why are we better off carrying resentment?

Investigation. Maybe we need more substantiation or facts? Is there independent verification of what happened? Have we mentioned to the potentially offending person that we are taken aback by their possible action and we would like to see if we understood correctly? Do the facts substantiate that we were really harmed on purpose? If not, why not just drop the whole thing?

Benefit/Cost Analysis. If there was a real harm, especially an intentional one, what is the benefit to us of carrying resentment? Should it be a big resentment? What should be its ranking among the other justified resentments we already have? Will its insertion into our resentment inventory mean we should discard a resentment of lesser injury? How long should we carry this resentment? Does it justify vengeance? Are we willing to suffer loss of friendship, destruction of property, expense, arrest, or social disfavor as a consequence of being judge, jury, and executioner? Would it simply be nicer to be rid of the resentment?

Forgiveness. Yes, it is possible to be rid of residual resentments through forgiveness. The reference links below will describe how this can be done. Here are a few pointers though:

Anonymity. The person you resent need not know of your resentment. In fact, it is much better and simpler if they do not know. A grudge nurtured in secret is much sweeter anyway.

Privacy. Unless the person whom you resent has asked for your forgiveness or, if you are absolutely certain that they will cherish your forgiveness, you should keep your forgiving private. It can be a gross

form of arrogance to approach another person in order to tell them that they are forgiven. Usually, they will have no idea of having committed an offense and they will wonder who the dickens you think you are forgiving them – God, perhaps?

Finality. Once you have forgiven another person the act is final. It need never be repeated nor should you permit the resentment to recur.

Of course, there is the old standby – prayer. After the discussion of each step in the Big Book, a number of methods to alleviate or remove problems are set forth. The persistent and fundamental tool "suggested" to us is prayer. Prayer should have been in the list above, but we didn't know how to rank it in order of difficulty. For some of us, prayer is the easy and natural tool for straightening out our lives. For others, it is an alien, even hostile, prospect. Whatever one's feeling about prayer might be, there should be steady effort to make it a primary ingredient in consciousness.

What is Forgiveness

The Dictionary on FORGIVE

for-give (fuhr giv') v. <-gave, -giv-en, -giv-ing>

1. to grant pardon for or remission of (an offense, sin, etc.); absolve.
2. to cancel or remit (a debt, obligation, etc.): to forgive the interest owed on a loan.
3. to grant pardon to (a person).
4. to cease to feel resentment against: to forgive one's enemies.
5. to pardon an offense or an offender.

Who is the Keeper of Our Wrongs

There may be a bit of our personal theology here. If yours is different, please don't be offended. You might just be right.

When we commit an offense (or fail to fulfill an obligation), the wrong is recorded. The party(s) we have offended, if any, might keep score – most

people do. We also add to the bag of guilt, shame, remorse, and self-loathing that we haul around with us.

But the real recorder has been built into the system of the universe by its Creator. It is automatic and inevitable that all wrongs are recorded and the one and only thing that can remove them is amendment (correction or repair) of the wrong. Period.

In the East, they call this system Karma. In metaphysics, they might call it the Akasha. Whatever it is called and wherever it is located (most likely within us), it works, and it always works without fail, especially for we alcoholics, it seems (joke).

Objectives of Forgiveness

Just who is being forgiven, and by whom?

Forgiving others. If an act of courtesy on our part will help others feel better about themselves, then perhaps we should let them know we have no negative feelings about their actions. But we should never believe that we can, in fact, interfere in their being forgiven in accordance with God's plan for them. Our beliefs and actions are not part of that plan.

Being forgiven by others. The same logic applies as with forgiving others. Cosmetic forgiveness between humans can be a compassionate act. However, genuine forgiveness is a very personal matter.

Being forgiven by God. God does not keep records nor does He carry grudges. The universal system of justice He has created takes care of correction and forgiveness automatically. He does not intervene. He simply loves us all the time.

Forgiving ourselves

Just as humans cannot truly forgive each other, self-forgiveness is not possible, either. However, there is more to be said here. We assuredly agree that many, if not most, alcoholics know guilt, shame, remorse,

and self-loathing to excess. We MUST be rid of these before we can truly see the perfection of the Creator within ourselves as we are intended to do. We must also be enabled to look into the mirror and smile at the creature emerging from the slime of self-centered assertion into the service of the Father through his fellows. Knowing that we are forgiven is a requirement for the sober life.

The first thing to do is to clear away the false crimes of which we have convicted ourselves. A solid Step Five will produce a list of our defects of character and a preliminary list of persons we have harmed. If we feel bad about ourselves for anything not on these lists, the lists are either incomplete or we are caught up in the defect of senseless self-condemnation. Feeling bad about oneself, which might have been justified when we were doing our damage, is often an emotional hangover that needs to be discarded. You can create a self-respect (not pride) list. It might be next to the mirror and it might say, "I have cause to respect myself today because I have ... (list of good deeds, steps taken, persons helped, prayers, etc.)." But, be sure never to put yourself on your Step Eight list.

The second thing to do is to take Step Nine (after one thorough Step Eight with your sponsor, of course). Why? Because an amend is the **only** means of gaining forgiveness.

Our "Right" to Forgive

We feel that when a wrong is committed there is an immediate creation of a record of the act. This record cannot be prevented NOR can it be eradicated through forgiveness. The injured party cannot remove the record, and God will not do so either, because He created the system of records in the first place. It works just fine for Him.

So, how are you and others absolved from our wrongs? You guessed it. Step Nine. Amendment (repair/correction) of the offense removes the record

automatically. Forgiveness plays no part whatsoever in absolution.

Why all this talk about forgiveness then? The fact is that we are not forgiving offenses against ourselves in the sense of removing the need for amendment on the part of the offender. That we cannot do. Only amendment can do that. Our act of forgiving is to clean out ourselves. That's right. We remove from ourselves the curse we have imposed upon ourselves to punish the offender. Our forgiveness absolves not their act but removes our own personal reaction to it.

Wow, what a concept! It is not their karma we correct, but our own!

Here are some additional sources we have found genuinely helpful. You might notice that some of them don't agree completely with what we have said. That doesn't make them, or us, wrong. It does make it necessary for you to dwell deeply upon your own convictions.

The Big Book on Forgiveness

Our Big Book (Alcoholics Anonymous) has a great deal to say about resentments and forgiveness. Enjoy.

Harboring Resentments is Fatal

We are reluctant to repeat the book.

However, some of the points it makes cannot be left without comment: If we were to read page 66 again, we would note the power of resentment far exceeds any conception we had of negative thinking. Were you aware that:

...a life which includes deep resentment leads only to futility and unhappiness.

The hours in which we allow futility and unhappiness in our lives are not worthwhile. Resentments waste our lives.

Resentments shut us off from the sunlight of the Spirit, thereby preventing the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience.

When shadowed from the sunlight of the Spirit, the insanity of alcohol returns, we drink again, and we die.

Harboring of resentments is fatal.

Yet, it must be done! There is striking evidence that resentment creates a physical poison in our bodies in addition to the mental and spiritual maladies it feeds.

Eradicating Resentments

How do we rid ourselves of resentments? Hopefully, this process began in step Four. Our list holds the key.

Note the message of the column headings in our inventory:

Column #1) **Who** do you hold a grudge against?

Column #2) **What** did they do that you found offensive?

Column #3) **How** did you contribute to their action? (what is *your* part?) and

Column #4) **Why** did you react with a resentment?

The first lesson is that resentments cannot be cleared up until we know we have them and why. The second lesson is that we have made ourselves vulnerable to the outside world to an extraordinary extent. Our entire self-concept has been molded by the opinions and actions of others, and our old thinking as to what we ought to be and were.

Next, it is necessary to be willing to let go of the resentment. You will learn more about this in Step Six. Moreover (and the Big Book doesn't give as much help here as it might), we must forgive the person we resent. There will be more discussion of forgiving others in Step Eight. Just accept right now that you are going to have to do it! There is no other course.

The ultimate key given you in the Big Book is the oft repeated notion that your life is now on a different basis. A basis is a foundation – that upon which all the rest stands. Your new basis is trusting and relying upon God.

The Art of Forgiveness

Reprinted from the Big Book (Alcoholics Anonymous) and the
12&12

We cannot be helpful to all people, but at least God will show us how to take a kindly and tolerant view of each and every one. Referring to our list again. Putting out of our minds the wrongs others had done, we resolutely looked for our own mistakes. Where had we been selfish, dishonest, self-seeking, and frightened? Though a situation had not been entirely our fault, we tried to disregard the other person involved entirely. Where were we to blame? The inventory was ours, not the other man's.

[Big Book, page 67, line 11]

If we are sorry for what we have done, and have the honest desire to let God take us to better things, we believe we will be forgiven and will have learned our lesson. If we are not sorry, and our conduct continues to harm others, we are quite sure to drink. We are not theorizing. These are facts out of our experience.

[Big Book, page 70, line 8]

The question of how to approach the man we hated will arise. It may be he had done us more harm than we have done him and, though we may have acquired a better attitude toward him, we are still not too keen about admitting our faults.

Nevertheless, with a person we dislike, we take the bit in our teeth. It is harder to go to an enemy than to a friend, but we find it much more beneficial to us. We go to him in a helpful and forgiving spirit, confessing our former ill feeling and expressing our regret.

Under no condition do we criticize such a person or argue.

[Big Book, page 77, line 18]

When we retire at night, we constructively review our day. Were we resentful, selfish, dishonest, or afraid? Do we owe an apology? Have we kept something to ourselves which should be discussed with another person at once? Were we kind and loving toward all? What could we have done better? Were we thinking of ourselves most of the time? Or were we thinking of what we could do for others, of what we could pack into the stream of life? But we must be careful not to drift into worry, remorse or morbid reflections, for that would diminish our usefulness to others. After making our review we ask God's forgiveness and inquire what corrective measures should be taken.

[Big Book, page 86, line 5]

Step Five

This vital Step was also the means by which we began to get the feeling that we could be forgiven, no matter what we had thought or done. Often it was while working on this Step with our sponsors or spiritual advisers that we first felt truly able to forgive others, no matter how deeply we felt they had wronged us. Our moral inventory had persuaded us that all-round forgiveness was desirable, but it was only when we resolutely tackled Step Five that we inwardly knew we'd be able to receive forgiveness and give it, too.

[12 & 12, page 57]

These obstacles, however, are very real. The first, and one of the most difficult, has to do with forgiveness. The moment we ponder a twisted or broken relationship with another person, our emotions go on the defensive. To escape looking at the wrongs we have done another, we resentfully focus on the wrong he has done us. This is especially true if he

has, in fact, behaved badly at all. Triumphant we seize upon his misbehavior as the perfect excuse for minimizing or forgetting our own.

Right here we need to fetch ourselves up sharply. It doesn't make much sense when a real tosspot calls a kettle black. Let's remember that alcoholics are not the only ones bedeviled by sick emotions. Moreover, it is usually a fact that our behavior when drinking has aggravated the defects of others. We've repeatedly strained the patience of our best friends to a snapping point, and have brought out the very worst in those who didn't think much of us to begin with. In many instances we are really dealing with fellow sufferers, people whose woes we have increased. If we are now about to ask forgiveness for ourselves, why shouldn't we start out by forgiving them, one and all?

[12 & 12, page 78]

Step Eight

We shall want to hold ourselves to the course of admitting the things we have done, meanwhile forgiving the wrongs done us, real or fancied. We should avoid extreme judgments, both of ourselves and of others involved. We must not exaggerate our defects or theirs. A quiet, objective view will be our steadfast aim. . [12 & 12, page 81] In all these situations we need self-restraint, honest analysis of what is involved, a willingness to admit when the fault is ours, and an equal willingness to forgive when the fault is elsewhere. . [12 & 12, page 91] ...that where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness ... It is by forgiving that one is forgiven.

[12 & 12, page 99]

Then he asked for the grace to bring love, forgiveness, harmony, truth, faith, hope,

light, and joy to every human being he could.

[12 & 12, page 101]

He thought it better to give comfort than to receive it; better to understand than to be understood; better to forgive than to be forgiven. .

[12 & 12, page 101]

At last, acceptance proved to be the key to my drinking problem. After I had been around AA for seven months, tapering off alcohol and pills, not finding the program working very well, I was finally able to say, "Okay, God. It is true that I--of all people, strange as it may seem, and even though I didn't give my permission--really, really am an alcoholic of sorts. And it's all right with me. Now, what am I going to do about it?" When I stopped living in the problem and began living in the answer, the problem went away. From that moment on, I have not had a single compulsion to drink.

And acceptance is the answer to all my problems today. When I am disturbed, it is because I find some person, place, thing, or situation--some fact of my life -- unacceptable to me, and I can find no serenity until] I accept that person, place, thing, or situation as being exactly the way it is supposed to be at this moment. Nothing, absolutely nothing happens in God's world by mistake. Until I could accept my alcoholism, I could not stay sober; unless I accept life completely on life's terms, I cannot be happy. I need to concentrate not so much on what needs to be changed in the world as on what needs to be changed in me and in my attitudes. .

[Big Book, page 448]

One morning, however, I realized I had to get rid of it, for my reprieve was running out, and if I didn't get rid of it I was going to get drunk--and I didn't want to get drunk any more. In my prayers that morning I

asked God to point out to me some way to be free of this resentment. During the day a friend of mine brought me some magazines to take to a hospital group I was interested in, and I looked through them and a "banner" across the front of one featured an article by a prominent clergyman in which I caught the word resentment

He said, in effect: "If you have a resentment you want to be free of, if you will pray for the person or the thing that you resent, you will be free. If you will ask in prayer for everything you want for yourself to be given to them, you will be free. Ask for their health, their prosperity, their happiness, and you will be free. Even when you don't really want it for them, and your prayers are only words and you don't mean it, go ahead and do it anyway. Do it every day for two weeks and you will find you have come to mean it and to want it for them and you will realize that where you used to feel bitterness and resentment and hatred, you now feel compassionate understanding and love."

It worked for me then, and it has worked for me many times since, and it will work for me every time I am willing to work it. Sometimes I have to ask first for the willingness, but it too always comes. Because it works for me, it will work for all of us. As another great man says, "The only real freedom a human being can ever know is doing what you ought to do because you want to do it."

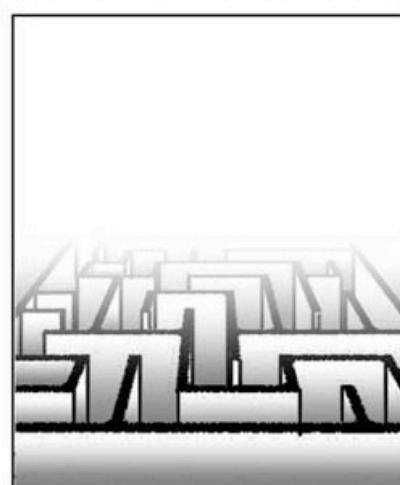
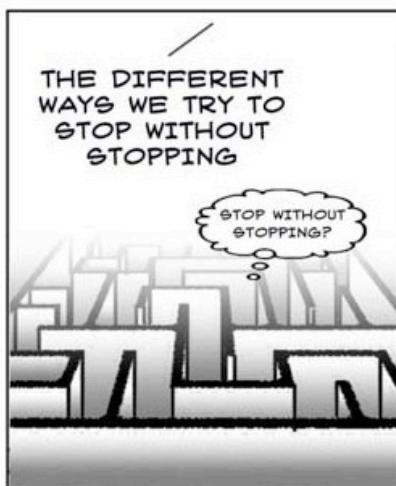
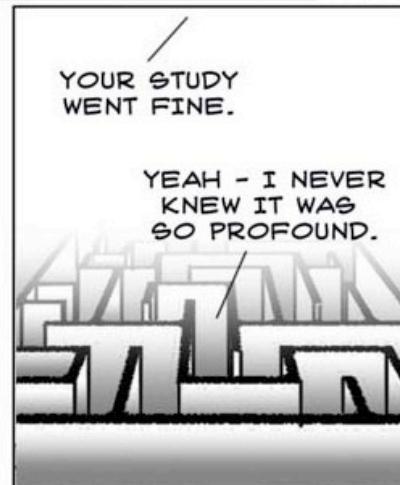
This great experience that released me from the bondage of hatred and replaced it with love is really just another affirmation of the truth I know: I get everything I need in Alcoholics Anonymous everything I need I get--and when I get what I need I invariably find that it was just what I wanted all the time. .

[Big Book, page 552]

MAZEING RECOVERY

HOMEWORK

BY JOE A.



How to Forgive: Ten Guidelines

By Victor M. Parachin *

As poet Edwin Markham approached his retirement years, he discovered that the man to whom he had entrusted his financial portfolio had squandered all the money. Markham's dream of a comfortable retirement vanished. He began to brood over the injustice and the loss. His anger deepened. Over time, Markham's bitterness grew by leaps and bounds. One day while sitting at his table, Markham found himself drawing circles as he tried to soothe the turmoil he felt within. Finally, he concluded: "I must forgive him, and I will forgive him." Looking again at the circles he had drawn on the paper before him, Markham wrote these lines:

*He drew a circle to shut me out, Heretic, rebel,
a thing to flout;*

*But love and I had the wit to win,
We drew a circle to take him in.*

Although Markham wrote hundreds of poems contained in many book volumes, the words he wrote while forgiving are his most popular and memorable. As he forgave, a tremendous act of creativity was released within Markham. The poets and mystics among us have long known and declared that the act of forgiveness releases great healing power.

Author and Minister Charles Fillmore recommended forgiveness as the most effective way of restoring inner harmony and balance: "There is a mental treatment guaranteed to cure

every ill that flesh is heir to: Sit for half an hour every night and forgive everyone against whom you have any ill will or antipathy," he wrote.

While forgiveness has always been an important concept in religion and ethics, only recently have psychologists begun to discover its powers as a psychotherapeutic tool. In three separate studies, people who had not resolved the wrongs done to them (college students, elderly women, and incest survivors) all improved when therapists helped them learn to forgive. Although an increasing number of counselors recommend that we forgive those who have hurt us, many people find forgiveness difficult to offer. Here are ten guidelines to help extend forgiveness and ease resentment.

Educate Yourself about Forgiveness

"Forgive," according to Webster's New World Dictionary, means: "to give up resentment against or the desire to punish; pardon; to overlook an offense; to cancel a debt." Thus, the goal of forgiveness is to let go of a hurt and move ahead with life. Visit a library and research books or magazine articles on forgiveness so that you understand the difference between healthy and unhealthy forgiveness. For example, Robert Enright, Ph.D., an education psychologist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, stresses that true forgiveness is not:

Forgetting. If the hurt wounded you enough to require forgiveness, you may always have a memory of it.

Excusing or condoning. The wrong should not be denied, minimized, or justified.

Reconciling. You can forgive the offender and still choose not to reestablish the relationship.

Weakness. You do not become a doormat or oblivious to cruelty.

Spend a Few Minutes Each Day Cleaning Your Thinking

At a local florist shop, I once watched the owner remove tiny bugs from a potted plant. Using a cotton swab he meticulously plucked off one small tenaciously clinging offender after another. Although that tedious process took him several hours of silent concentration and steady work, he was able to rid the plant of what would ultimately stunt its growth and ruin its loveliness. There is a lesson from that florist which applies to daily living. The only way to keep ourselves free from the infestation of troublesome thoughts is to spend a few minutes each day cleaning out our thinking.

Has someone hurt you by his or her comments? Were you publicly insulted by someone? Did a friend fail to come through for you? Pluck off each offending layer of thought and dispose of it just as the florist disposed of the tiny insects destroying his lovely plant. Doing so insures that a vague irritation does not transform itself into a deep resentment and an intense hatred.

Practice on Small Hurts

To become a generous forgiver of major pains, practice forgiveness on small hurts. Forgive immediately the small slights inflicted by strangers – a rude clerk, a driver who cut you off, a doctor who keeps you waiting and waiting, etc. Use those events as practice time to prepare you for the tougher task of forgiving major hurts.

Challenge the "Shoulds" in Your Thinking

Forgiveness is much easier when you give up the irrational belief that fuels your frustration, anger, and hostility – the expectation that other people will always act in the way you want. Beware of the "shoulds" in your thinking and speaking:

He shouldn't have done this to me.

She shouldn't act that way.

My daughter should have known better.

My son should be more attentive to me.

I've worked hard and I should have been rewarded.

Whenever you find the word "should" in your mind and talk, challenge yourself. Tell yourself it is unrealistic to expect that people will always act decently and respectfully toward you. Remind yourself that everyone is fallible and capable of making a mistake.

Understand That Resentment has a High Price Tag

"Holding a grudge takes mental, emotional, and physical energy. It makes you obsessive, angry, and depressed," observes Barry Lubetkin, a psychologist and director of the Institute for Behavior Therapy in New York City. "There's a strong connection between anger and a wide spectrum of health miseries – chronic stomach upset, heart problems, and skin conditions among them. Without question, the more anger we experience within, the more stress we're under," he adds. Whenever a hostile or hateful thought enters your mind, try to be fully aware of the harm that resentment can do to you, even making you ill. Let that knowledge further motivate you to forgive and let go.

Remember: Lack of Forgiveness is Giving Others Power over You.

Withholding forgiveness and nursing resentment simply allow another person to have control over your well-being. It is always a mistake to let such negative emotions influence your living. Forgive, and you will be able to direct your life in positive thoughts and actions. An excellent example is that of educator Booker T. Washington (1856-1915). An emancipated slave who started out living in abject poverty; he had to work from the age of nine to help support his family. Instead of becoming bitter about the hardships he faced and viewing himself as a victim, Washington worked hard to improve his situation. He first became a janitor in a school to obtain his education. Then he went on to teach at Hampton Institute, one of the first African-American colleges in the U.S. Later he organized and became president of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. "I shall allow no man to belittle my soul by making me hate him," was Washington's lifelong motto.

Recognize the Ripple Effect of Harboring a Grudge

When you can't forgive someone, there can be a ripple effect which negatively infects your family and friends. Writing to advice columnist "Dear Abby," a woman says: "I have something to say to the millions of families whose lives are affected by divorce. An unforgiving and bitter person who has not let go of animosities can poison an entire family and ruin the holidays for everyone. I know. I was that person." The writer, who signs herself as "Free in Vermont," explains she could not forgive her former husband and his new wife, and her children suffered her ensuing bitterness. "One day after a particularly harsh outburst, I understood the pained reaction on my children's faces. I prayed for the strength to change my ways so that I could stop hurting those I love most in the world." Although it was difficult for "Free in

Vermont" to extend forgiveness, she did so and says:

"I have peace in my heart and my children are happy. They are free to enjoy both homes." Forgiveness is a priceless gift which you can give to yourself and your family.

Bury the Grudge – Literally

Write a letter to the person who hurt you but don't mail it. Express fully, clearly, honestly, how you feel and why that person's act hurt you and made you angry. Conclude with the bold declaration that you have forgiven him or her. Then, bury the letter in a potted plant or somewhere in your yard. This is a powerful symbolic exercise that many people have found to be extremely therapeutic.

Try Instant Forgiveness

Lewis Smedes, a professor of ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, and author of *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve*, tells of his rage toward a police officer who brutalized his young son, John. The officer was a large 250-pound lawman who assaulted his 140-pound son and then charged him with resisting an officer. Although the charge was quickly dismissed, Smedes's rage and hostility were not so quickly appeased. Realizing that his intense feelings toward the police officer were creating a personal emotional crisis, Smedes knew he had to find a way of forgiving.

"I tried a technique that everything in my temperament resisted," he writes. "I thought about how a priest gives instant absolution to a penitent, right off the bat, in the confessional booth. And I decided to give this cop absolution. 'In the name of God I hereby forgive you—go in peace,' I said out loud, at least six times. It worked enough to get me going. I felt myself pried a couple of inches off my hate. And I was on my way."

Recall Repeatedly This One Vital Fact

Forgiveness is a Gift You Give Yourself

A former inmate of a Nazi concentration camp was visiting a friend who shared the ordeal with him.

"Have you forgiven the Nazis?" he asked his friend.

"Yes."

"Well, I haven't. I'm still consumed with hatred for them," the other man declared.

"In that case," said his friend gently, "they still have you in prison."

That story points out this reality: ultimately, forgiveness is a gift you give yourself. Bitterness and anger imprison you emotionally. Forgiveness sets you free.

*About this article. We first encountered Victor's fine guidance in *Venture Inward*, May/June 1999, the Magazine of the Association for Research and Enlightenment of the Edgar Cayce Foundation. Victor Parachin, an ordained

minister and writer living in Claremont, California, is the author of 365 Good Reasons to Be a Vegetarian.

On May 20th, 1999 we asked Victor if we might post his wisdom here. He was kind enough to permit his words to be posted because he hoped that they might be of help to additional people. Victor, your practical guidance is just what we need!

We have no knowledge of the extent to which Victor is familiar with AA. Because he is a minister, though, we assume he has seen families ravaged by alcoholism. His words have the same truth and practicality we have heard in our Big Book and meetings. AA is blessed with its wonderful friends, even when they might be so only in spirit.

This notebook then asked permission for sober.org to include materials in this volume, crediting the article back to them. We appreciate their cooperation.

Lord's Prayer & Forgiveness

by Rocco A. Errico

Free Us from Our Offenses

WASHBOKLAN KHOBEN: AICANNA DOP KHNAN SHBAKN LKHAYAVEN means "Forgive us our offenses, as we have forgiven our offenders." A literal translation would read: "Free us [from] our offenses as also we have freed our offenders." The word KHOBEN used here means something more than just "debts," as it has been translated in other translations of the Bible. It also means "faults," "mistakes," or "offenses." The word SHBAKN, which has been translated as "forgive," also means "to free," "to untie," "to loosen," or "to release."

Forgiveness Frees Us

Forgiveness frees us from past errors which we have committed, or which have been committed against us, and enables us to start on a new path of life. Genuine forgiveness heals any hurts or wrongs. It strengthens the disheartened soul which has lost its way. It refreshes and renews our hope. It is through forgiveness that we are "born again" and "become like a child." In this way we regain the precious attitude of a willing mind which is ready to learn all over again.

Nature Doesn't Condemn

Jesus was a strong advocate of forgiveness. This is one of the important teachings that make his Gospel so appealing and so powerful. He knew, through his own experiences of life and through his study of the Scriptures, that Nature does not

blame nor "point its finger" when things go wrong. Nature always endeavors to heal or correct an injury or hurt. For example, when I cut my finger, the life forces in my body immediately rush to the aid of the injured area to fight off infection and to start the coagulation of blood to prevent excessive bleeding. The body doesn't attempt to seek out the one who did the damage. Its only interest is to repair the wound. Jesus knew that God is a loving, forgiving Father Who cares for His children. He also knew that forgiveness is the beginning of the rectification of all human mistakes. Blaming doesn't heal anything, but forgiveness does. Our Lord, understanding mankind as he did, made room for human weaknesses and faults, and stressed the need for practicing forgiveness. He knew that forgiveness would restore broken human relationships.

A Two-Way Street

"And free us from our offenses." How we all love this part of the prayer, for we all long to be free of the guilt which accompanies past offenses. But there's a catch to it: "as also we have freed our offenders." How often we seem to overlook this important part! We all want to be freed from our offenses. We also want other people to put up with our shortcomings. But how well do we put up with their shortcomings? In other words, through these words of the prayer we are asking: "Let me experience the same freedom from my offenses as I have allowed others to experience." Let us stop

and think about that for a moment. How many times I have heard people say, "I forgive him," and then a few minutes later they start talking about him again. They haven't released the offense. They're still holding onto it!

When we hold grudges and allow them to build up in our minds, we suffer mentally and physically. We often become unbearable to live with. When we don't forgive others, how can we expect forgiveness to be extended to us? If we become difficult and unforgiving toward others, they will treat us likewise. It is impossible to escape the law of reaping what we have sown. We find that what we really think of ourselves, deep within, is felt by others and reflected back to us as their "impression" of us. It is essential, for our sake and theirs, that we learn to forgive others, and to forgive ourselves as well. It is also interesting to realize that we always keep the "original copy" of whatever we send out to others, be it hate and resentment, or love and forgiveness.

"Wise as Serpents"

This does not mean, however, that we should not be careful of certain people who are determined to do evil. Jesus told his disciples to be "wise as serpents" (See Matthew 10:16). He used this example because he 'had observed that when a serpent sees trouble coming it gets out of the way; it wants to avoid being stepped on. We should also do this! When we see trouble coming, we should get out of its way; side-step it.

Thus, be wise when you know a person does evil and wishes to hurt. You can forgive him, but stay out of his way lest you get "stepped on." Therefore, be "wise as serpents."

"Pure as Doves"

In the passage just mentioned, Jesus also told his disciples to be "pure as doves." Doves love to go where people are gentle, where people are good. They love to sit on the shoulder of a meek

man. They make their nests in certain homes because they know they will not be mistreated there. They sense it, and the people love to have them nearby.

There's a reference to this phenomenon in the Song of Solomon 2:12:

The flowers appear on the earth; the time of pruning has come, and the voice of the turtle dove is heard in our land;

In most English translations, "turtle dove" has been wrongly translated as "turtle." This is very misleading, since the "voice" of the turtle cannot be heard. The voice of the turtle dove, however, is a joy to all; hearing it means the doves have built a nest nearby and there is tranquility and peace. When people are upset and there is quarreling in the homes, the doves leave. They become frightened at the vibrations they feel from the trouble in the homes, but when they stay it is a sign of peace and harmony.

If we are to be "pure as doves," then we must have a forgiving but wise heart. We shouldn't remain where there is constant strife or where there are troublemakers. We must be at peace with all and avoid trouble whenever possible.

Self-Forgiveness, Too

But there is something more to consider about forgiveness. Jesus was teaching us here that our own forgiveness comes to us through the act of practicing forgiveness. If we don't forgive others, it's hard for us to forgive ourselves. People who refuse to forgive others usually won't forgive themselves either. But when a person releases others he usually will not hold a grudge against himself.

"Pure in Heart"

These words of the prayer help us to tune in to the needs of others and to our own needs. They help us to clear our minds of hatred and resentment so we may again commune with one

another and with our Father. They help us to purify our minds, for, as Jesus said,

"Blessed are the pure in heart [those who have a clear mind and conscience], for they shall see God." (Matthew 5:8)

The Sixth Attunement

Forgiveness revitalizes our souls and releases the inner tensions and bondages which plague our minds. This attunement would not be complete without the powerful act of forgiveness for

ourselves and for others. This is the sixth attunement.

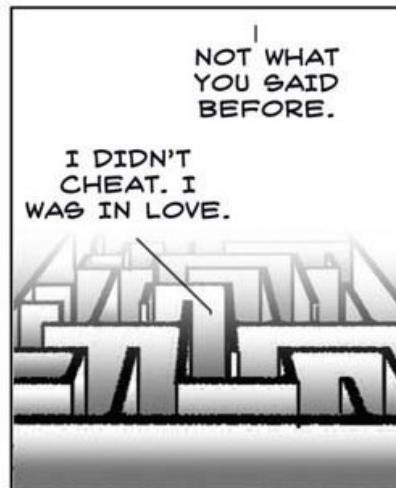
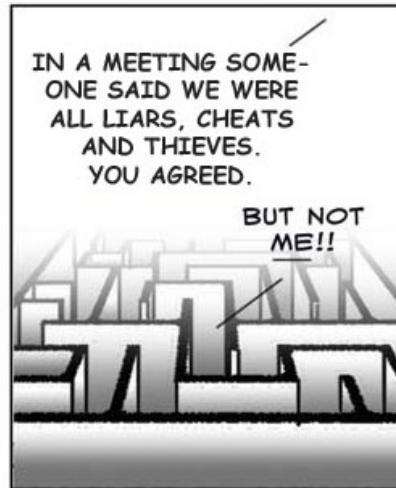
Rocco Errico, The Reprinted from "the Ancient Aramaic Prayer of Jesus, the Lord's Prayer", by Rocco A. Errico.

*[This book has been revised and expanded under a new title, *Setting a Trap for God, The Aramaic Prayer of Jesus* (ISBN 0-87159-124-3). Copies may be ordered from Unity Press (800) 669-0282. Our quotation is from the original book.]*

MAZEING RECOVERY

LIP MOVEMENT

BY JOE A.



Forgiveness

Reprinted from The Sermon On the Mount, by Emmet Fox

“Forgive Us Our Trespasses, as We Forgive Them that Trespass Against Us”

This clause is the turning point of the Prayer. It is the strategic key to the whole Recovery. Let us notice here that Jesus has so arranged this marvelous Prayer that it covers the entire ground of the enfoldment of our souls completely, and in the most concise and telling way. It omits nothing that is essential for our salvation, and yet, so compact is it that there is not a thought or a word too much. Every idea fits into its place with perfect harmony and in perfect sequence. Anything more would be redundant; anything less would be incompleteness, and at this point, it takes up the critical factor of forgiveness.

Having told us what God is, what man is, how the universe works, how we are to do our own work (the salvation of humanity and of our own souls), he then explains what our true nourishment or supply is, and the way in which we can obtain it. Now, he comes to the forgiveness of sins.

The forgiveness of sins is the central problem of life. Sin is a sense of separation from God and is the major tragedy of human experience. It is, of course, rooted in selfishness. It is essentially an attempt to gain some supposed good to which we are not entitled in justice. It is a sense of isolated, self-regarding, personal existence, whereas the Truth of Being is that all are One. Our true selves

are at one with God, undivided from Him, expressing His ideas, witnessing to His nature – the dynamic Thinking of that Mind. Because we are all one with the great Whole of which we are spiritually a part, it follows that we are one with all men. Just because in Him we live and move and have our being, we are, in the absolute sense, all essentially one.

Evil, sin, the fall of man, in fact, are essentially the attempt to negate this Truth in our thoughts. We try to live apart from God. We try to do without Him. We act as though we had a life of our own, as separate minds, as though we could have plans, purposes, and interests separate from His. All this, if it were true, would mean that existence is not one and harmonious, but a chaos of competition and strife. It would mean that we are quite separate from our fellow man and could injure him, rob him, or hurt him, or even destroy him, without any damage to ourselves. In fact, that the more we took from other people the more we should have for ourselves. It would mean that the more we considered our own interests, and the more indifferent we were to the welfare of others, the better off we should be. Of course it would then follow naturally that it would pay others to treat us in the same way, and that accordingly we might expect many of them to do so. Now if this were true, it would mean that the whole universe is only a jungle; that sooner or later it must destroy itself by its own inherent weakness and

anarchy. But, of course, it is not true and therein lays the joy of life.

Undoubtedly, many people do act as though they believed it to be true, and a great many more who would be dreadfully shocked if brought face to face with that proposition in cold blood, have nevertheless, a vague feeling that such must be very much the way things are even though they, themselves, are personally above consciously acting in accordance with such a notion. Now, this is the real basis of sin, of resentment, of condemnation, of jealousy, of remorse, and all the evil brood that walk that path.

This belief in independent and separate existence is the arch sin, and now, before we can progress any further, we have to take the knife to this evil thing and cut it out once and for all. Jesus knew this, and with this definite end in view, he inserted at this critical point a carefully prepared statement that would encompass our end and his, without the shadow of a possibility of miscarrying. He inserted what is nothing less than a trip clause. He drafted a declaration that would force us, without any conceivable possibility of escape, evasion, mental reservation, or subterfuge of any kind, to execute the great sacrament of forgiveness in all its fullness and far-reaching power.

As we repeat the Great Prayer intelligently, considering and meaning what we say, we are suddenly, so to speak, caught up off our feet and grasped as though in a vise, so that we must face this problem – and there is no escape. We must positively and definitely extend forgiveness to everyone to whom it is possible that we can owe forgiveness, namely, to anyone that we think can have injured us in any way. Jesus leaves no room for any possible glossing of this fundamental thing. He has constructed his Prayer with more skill than ever yet lawyer displayed in the casting of a deed. He has so contrived it that once our attention has been drawn to this matter, we are inevitably obliged either to forgive our enemies in

sincerity and truth, or never again to repeat that prayer. It is safe to say that no one who reads this booklet with understanding will ever again be able to use the Lord's Prayer unless and until he has forgiven. Should you now attempt to repeat it without forgiving, it can safely be predicted that you will not be able to finish it. This great central clause will stick in your throat.

Notice that Jesus does not say, "forgive me my trespasses and I will try to forgive others," or "I will see if it can be done," or "I will forgive generally, with certain exceptions." He obliges us to declare that we have actually forgiven, and forgiven all; and he makes our claim to our own forgiveness to depend upon that. Who is there that has grace enough to say his prayers at all, who does not long for the forgiveness or cancellation of his own mistakes and faults? Who would be so insane as to endeavor to seek the Kingdom of God without desiring to be relieved of his own sense of guilt? No one, we may believe. So, we see that we are trapped in the inescapable position that we cannot demand our own release before we have released our brother.

The forgiveness of others is the vestibule of Heaven, and Jesus knew it, and has led us to the door. You must forgive everyone who has ever hurt you if you want to be forgiven yourself; that is the long and the short of it. You have to get rid of all resentment and condemnation of others, and not least, of self-condemnation and remorse. You have to forgive others and, having discontinued your own mistakes, you have to accept the forgiveness of God for them too, or you cannot make any progress. You have to forgive yourself, but you cannot forgive yourself sincerely until you have forgiven others first. Having forgiven others, you must be prepared to forgive yourself too. To refuse to forgive oneself is only spiritual pride. "And by that sin fell the angels." We cannot make this point too clear to ourselves; we have got to forgive. There are few people in the world who

have not at some time or another been hurt, really hurt, by someone else, or been disappointed, or injured, or deceived, or misled. Such things sink into the memory where they usually cause inflamed and festering wounds, and there is only one remedy – they have to be plucked out and thrown away. The one and only way to do that is by forgiveness.

Of course, nothing in the entire world is easier than to forgive than people who have not hurt us very much. Nothing is easier than to rise above than the thought of a trifling loss. Anybody will be willing to do this but what the Law of Being requires of us is that we forgive not only these trifles, but also the very things that are so hard to forgive that at first it seems impossible to do it at all. The despairing heart cries, "It is too much to ask. That thing meant too much to me. It is impossible. I cannot forgive it." But the Lord's Prayer makes our own forgiveness from God, which means our escape from guilt and limitation, dependent upon just this very thing. There is no escape from this, and so forgiveness there must be, no matter how deeply we may have been injured, or how terribly we have suffered. It must be done.

If your prayers are not being answered, search your consciousness and see if there is not someone whom you have yet to forgive. Find out if there is not some old thing about which you are very resentful. Search and see if you are not really holding a grudge (it may be camouflaged in some self-righteous way) against some individual, or some body of people, a nation, a race, a social class, some religious movement of which you disapprove perhaps, a political party, or what-not. If you are doing so, then you have an act of forgiveness to perform, and when this is done, you will probably take your action. If you cannot forgive at present, you will have to wait for your demonstration until you can. You will have to postpone finishing your recital of the Lord's

Prayer, as well, or involve yourself in the position that you do not desire the forgiveness of God.

Setting others free means setting yourself free because resentment is really a form of attachment. It is a Cosmic Truth that it takes two to make a prisoner; the prisoner – and a jailer. There is no such thing as being a prisoner on one's own account. Every prisoner must have a gaoler, and the gaoler is as much a prisoner as his charge. When you hold resentment against anyone, you are bound to that person by a cosmic link, a real, though mental chain. You are tied by a cosmic tie to the thing that you hate. The one person perhaps in the whole world whom you most dislike is the very one to whom you are attaching yourself by a hook that is stronger than steel. Is this what you wish? Is this the condition in which you desire to go on living? Remember, you belong to the thing with which you are linked in thought. At some time or other, if that tie endures, the object of your resentment will be drawn again into your life, perhaps to work further havoc. Do you think that you can afford this? Of course, no one can afford such a thing and so the way is clear. You must cut all such ties by a clear and spiritual act of forgiveness. You must loose him and let him go. By forgiveness you set yourself free; you save your soul. Because the law of love works alike for one and all, you also help to save his soul, making it so much easier for him to become what he ought to be.

But how, in the name of all that is wise and good, is the magic act of forgiveness to be accomplished, when we have been so deeply injured that, though we have long wished with all our hearts that we could forgive, we have nevertheless found it impossible; when we have tried and tried to forgive, but have found the task beyond us.

The technique of forgiveness is simple enough, and not very difficult to manage when you understand how. The only thing that is essential is

willingness to forgive. Provided you desire to forgive the offender, the greater part of the work is already done. People have always made such a misunderstanding of forgiveness because they have been under the erroneous impression that to forgive a person means that you have to compel yourself to like him. Happily this is by no means the case – we are not called upon to like anyone whom we do not find ourselves liking spontaneously, and indeed, it is quite impossible to like people to order. You can no more like people to order than you can hold the winds in your fist. If you endeavor to coerce yourself into doing so, you will finish by disliking or hating the offender more than ever. People used to think that when someone had hurt them very much, it was their duty, as good Christians, to pump up, as it were, a feeling of liking for him. Since such a thing is utterly impossible, they suffered a great deal of distress, and ended, necessarily, with failure and a resulting sense of sinfulness. We are not obliged to like anyone, but we are under a binding obligation to love everyone. Love, or charity as the Bible calls it, meaning a vivid sense of impersonal good will. This has nothing directly to do with the feelings. It is always followed, sooner or later, by a wonderful feeling of peace and happiness.

The method of forgiving is this: Get by yourself and become quiet. Repeat any prayer or treatment that appeals to you, or read a chapter of the Bible. Then quietly say, "I fully and freely forgive X (mentioning the name of the offender); I loose him and let him go. I completely forgive the whole business in question. As far as I am concerned, it is finished forever. I cast the burden of resentment upon the Christ within me. He is free now, and I am free too. I wish him well in every phase of his life. That incident is finished. The Christ Truth has

set us both free. I thank God." Then get up and go about your business. On no account repeat this act of forgiveness, because you have done it once and for all, and to do it a second time would be tacitly to repudiate your own work. Afterward, whenever the memory of the offender or the offense happens to come into your mind, bless the delinquent briefly and dismiss the thought. Do this however many times the thought may come back. After a few days it will return less and less often, until you forget it altogether. Then, perhaps after an interval, shorter or longer, the old trouble may come back to memory once more. You will find that now all bitterness and resentment have disappeared and you are both free with the perfect freedom of the children of God. Your forgiveness is complete. You will experience a wonderful joy in the realization of the demonstration.

Everybody should practice general forgiveness every day as a matter of course. When you say your daily prayers, issue a general amnesty, forgiving everyone who may have injured you in any way, and on no account particularize. Simply say: "I freely forgive everyone." Then, in the course of the day, should the thought of grievance or resentment come up, bless the offender briefly, and dismiss the thought.

The result of this policy will be that very soon you will find yourself cleared of all resentment and condemnation and the effect upon your happiness, your bodily health, and your general life will be nothing less than revolutionary.

Fred S., Raleigh, NC

Parable of the Prodigal Son

As Seen Through Christianity and Buddhism

Most of you know the Parable of the Prodigal Son as it appears in Luke's gospel, but probably few are aware that it has a Buddhist parallel in one of the major writings of Mahayana Buddhism. Although both parables seem to convey a similar message regarding God's compassion for humans, a closer look will reveal fundamental differences in their teaching and consequently, between Christianity and Buddhism. Let us quote both parables and then analyze them.

First, here is the text in the Gospel According to Luke:

There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, "Father, give me my share of the estate." So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there, squandered his wealth in wild living.

After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, "How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men." So he got up and went to his father. But after a while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son,

threw his arms around him, and kissed him. The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." So they began to celebrate.

Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. "Your brother has come," he replied, "and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound." The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, "Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!" "My son," the father said, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." (Luke 15:11-32)

The Buddhist parable is longer:

A young man left his father and ran away. For long he dwelt in other countries, for ten, or twenty, or fifty years. The older he grew, the needier he became. Wandering in all directions to seek clothing and food, he unexpectedly

approached his native country. The father had searched for his son all those years in vain and meanwhile had settled in a certain city. His home became very rich; his goods and treasures were fabulous.

At this time, the poor son, wandering through village after village and passing through countries and cities, at last reached the city where his father had settled. The father had always been thinking of his son, yet, although he had been parted from him over fifty years, he had never spoken of the matter to anyone. He only pondered over it within himself and cherished regret in his heart, saying, "Old and worn out I am. Although I own much wealth – gold, silver, and jewels, granaries and treasures overflowing – I have no son. Someday my end will come and my wealth will be scattered and lost, for I have no heir. If I could only get back my son and commit my wealth to him, how contented and happy would I be, with no further anxiety!"

Meanwhile the poor son, hired for wages here and there, unexpectedly arrived at his father's house. Standing by the gate, he saw from a distance his father seated on a lion-couch, his feet on a jeweled footstool, and with expensive strings of pearls adorning his body, revered and surrounded by priests, warriors, and citizens, attendants and young slaves waiting upon him right and left. The poor son, seeing his father having such great power, was seized with fear, regretting that he had come to this place. He reflected, "This must be a king, or someone of royal rank, it is impossible for me to be hired here. I had better go to some poor village in search of a job, where food and clothing are easier to get. If I stay here long, I may suffer oppression." Reflecting thus, he rushed away.

Meanwhile the rich elder on his lion-seat had recognized his son at first glance, and with great joy in his heart reflected, "Now I have someone to whom I may pass on my wealth. I have always been thinking of my son, with no means of seeing him, but suddenly he himself has come and my longing is satisfied. Though worn with years, I yearn for him."

Instantly he sent off his attendants to pursue the son quickly and fetch him back. Immediately the messengers hasten forth to seize him. The poor son, surprised and scared, loudly cried his complaint, "I have committed no offense against you, why should I be arrested?" The messengers all the more hastened to lay hold of him and brought him back. Following that, the poor son, thought that although he was innocent he would be imprisoned, and that now he would surely die. He became all the more terrified, fainted away and fell on the ground. The father, seeing this from a distance, sent word to the messengers, "I have no need for this man. Do not bring him by force. Sprinkle cold water on his face to restore him to consciousness and do not speak to him any further." Why? The father, knowing that his son's disposition was inferior, knowing that his own lordly position had caused distress to his son, yet convinced that he was his son, tactfully did not say to others, "This is my son."

A messenger said to the son, "I set you free, go wherever you will." The poor son was delighted, thus obtaining the unexpected release. He arose from the ground and went to a poor village in search of food and clothing. Then the elder, desiring to attract his son, set up a device. Secretly he sent two men, sorrowful and poor in appearance, saying, "Go and visit that place and gently say to the poor man, 'There is a place for you to work here. We will hire you for scavenging, and we both also will work along with you.'" Then the two messengers went in search of the poor son and, having found him, presented him the above proposal. The poor son, having received his wages in advance, joined them in removing a refuse heap.

His father, beholding the son, was struck with compassion for him. One day he saw at a distance, through the window, his son's figure, haggard and drawn, lean and sorrowful, filthy with dirt and dust. He took off his strings of jewels, his soft attire, and put on a coarse, torn, and dirty garment, smeared his body with dust, took a basket in his right hand, and with an appearance fear-inspiring said to the laborers, "Get on with your work, don't be lazy." By such

means he got near to his son, to whom he afterwards said, "Ay, my man, you stay and work here, do not leave again. I will increase your wages, give whatever you need, bowls, rice, wheat-flour, salt, vinegar, and so on. Have no hesitation; besides there is an old servant whom you can get if you need him. Be at ease in your mind; I am, as it were, your father; do not be worried again. Why? I am old and advanced in years, but you are young and vigorous; all the time you have been working, you have never been deceitful, lazy, angry, or grumbling. I have never seen you, like the other laborers, with such vices as these. From this time forth you will be as my own begotten son."

The elder gave him a new name and called him a son. But the poor son, although he rejoiced at this happening, still thought of himself as a humble hireling. For this reason, grew mutual confidence between the father and the son. He went in and out and at his father's for twenty years he continued to be employed in scavenging. After this period, there ease, though his abode was still in a small hut.

Then the father became ill and, knowing that he would die soon, said to the poor son, "Now I possess an abundance of gold, silver, and precious things, and my granaries and treasures are full to overflowing. I want you to understand in detail the quantities of these things, and the amounts that should be received and given. This is my wish, and you must agree to it. Why? Because now we are of the same mind. Be increasingly careful so that there is no waste." The poor son accepted his instruction and commands, and became acquainted with all the goods. However, he still had no idea of expecting to inherit anything, his abode was still the original place, and he was still unable to abandon his sense of inferiority.

After a short time had again passed, the father noticed that his son's ideas had gradually been enlarged, his aspirations developed, and that he despised his previous state of mind. Seeing that his own end was approaching, he commanded his son to come, and gathered all his relatives, the kings, priests, warriors, and citizens. When they were all assembled, he addressed them saying, "Now, gentlemen, this

is my son, begotten by me. It is over fifty years since, from a certain city, he left me and ran away to endure loneliness and misery. His former name was so-and-so and my name was so-and-so. At that time in that city I sought him sorrowfully. Suddenly I met him in this place and regained him. This is really my son and I am really his father. Now all the wealth which I possess belongs entirely to my son, and all my previous disbursements and receipts are known by this son." When the poor son heard these words of his father, great was his joy at such unexpected news, and thus he thought, "Without any mind for, or effort on my part, these treasures now come to me."

World-honored One! The very rich elder is the Tathagata, and we are all as the Buddha's sons. The Buddha has always declared that we are his sons. But because of the three sufferings, in the midst of births-and-deaths we have borne all kinds of torments, being deluded and ignorant and enjoying our attachment to things of no value. Today the World-honored One has caused us to ponder over and remove the dirt of all diverting discussions of inferior things. In these we have hitherto been diligent to make progress and have got, as it were, a day's pay for our effort to reach nirvana. Obtaining this, we greatly rejoiced and were contented, saying to ourselves, "For our diligence and progress in the Buddha-law what we have received is ample". The Buddha, knowing that our minds delighted in inferior things, by his tactfulness taught according to our capacity, but still we did not perceive that we are really Buddha's sons. Therefore we say that though we had no mind to hope or expect it, yet now the Great Treasure of the King of the Law has of itself come to us, and such things that Buddha-sons should obtain, we have all obtained. (Saddharmapundarika Sutra 4)

The Parable in its Context

In Luke, the parable reveals the nature of God in Christianity, His expectation that all sinners may return to a father-son relationship with Him. Jesus told this parable to a large public consisting of both "religious experts" of the day, the Pharisees, and the people most

despised by them, the tax collectors, prostitutes, and other outcasts (Luke 15:1-2). The Pharisees considered these "sinners" to be outside the acceptable boundary of God's kingdom and accused Jesus for enjoying their company. In contrast to their attitude, He told the previous two parables in the same chapter (The Lost Sheep and The Lost Coin), in order to emphasize His initiative in seeking and saving such sinners. In response, they acknowledged their sinful life and came to Jesus for healing and forgiveness, while the Pharisees considered themselves good enough according to God's standards (see the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector – Luke 18:9-14). Thus the Parable of the Prodigal Son reveals both God's love for those who were ready to accept it (the prodigal son who returns to his father), and His rejection of the Pharisees' hypocrisy and self-centered righteousness (the older son in the parable). Although the contrast between the two sons is an important point in the parable, as the Buddhist parable speaks only of a prodigal son, the teaching about the older son in Luke will be ignored in this comparison.

The Buddhist parable is part of the famous Saddharmapundarika Sutra (also called the Lotus Sutra, composed at the end of the second century AD), which revealed the new teaching of Mahayana Buddhism regarding the bodhisattva beings. The discourse of the Buddha is said to have taken place in front of a very large public, consisting of arhats, nuns, bodhisattvas, gods, and other beings. His teaching was addressed to those who have reached the arhat stage of becoming and are supposed to advance further by becoming a bodhisattva. As the son in the parable shouldn't be satisfied by his lower status, the Buddhist disciples should also aspire to a higher position, that of becoming a bodhisattva. It will eventually be attained step-by-step after a long instructing and testing process.

The Characters

In the gospel, the father represents God, the Ultimate Reality in Christianity, while the prodigal son is the one living in sin, who finally repents and returns to a fellowship relation

with God. In the Sutra, the father is Buddha (or more specifically, the Buddha nature – Dharmakaya), while the son is the one struggling to become an enlightened bodhisattva being.

The Son's Departure and Miserable Condition

The prodigal son in Luke declares he has had enough of staying home in obedience to his father and wants to be on his own. He not only wants to leave home, but he even dares to claim his inheritance, the fortune he is supposed to get at his father's death. Such a demand is extremely outrageous, especially in the Middle Eastern context. However, instead of rebuking or even denouncing his son, the father grants his request.

Soon after this, the son left for a distant country and there he squandered his entire fortune in wild living. This probably was a quite new and interesting experience for him, but it brought him to bankruptcy. Now he had to find a job to make a living in that country and the best offer he had was to feed someone's pigs. In a Jewish context, the pigs are considered unclean animals, therefore being hired to feed them and even being hungry enough to long for their food illustrates the worst possible situation one can reach.

The spiritual meaning of the prodigal son's leaving his home is assimilated in Christianity with man's rebellion against God, his heavenly father. God does not oppose one's freedom of will in choosing how to live. As the son in the parable claimed his inheritance and then squandered it, humans use all that God has granted them (wealth, health, time, and relationships), not for serving Him in obedience, but against His will. This attitude is called sin, and brings humans to the lowest possible stage of decadence. Although living in sin is at first very attractive and pleasant, in the end it leads to destruction, both from an existential and a spiritual point of view.

Another important observation here is that although the father in the parable gave a large fortune to his son, he was still rich after the

son's departure. However, the father's only concern proved to be his son's personal safety and return to the family. His wealth plays no role for him. As the rich man in the parable didn't become poor by his son's departure, God does not lose anything by our decision to live in rebellion to Him. The only one who is losing everything is man. The prodigal son of the Buddhist Sutra leaves home without any fortune from his father. His departure looks more like running away in secrecy. He also becomes needier, but is still able to make a living. The father doesn't seem to have been rich at the moment of his son's departure. He rather became rich after this episode, in another city than the one in which he previously lived with his son. Therefore the son had no wealthy position to remember from home and to eventually return to. Even if he would have, the father had left it, so there was no place for him to return. Regarding the father's concern in this story, he seems more worried about having an heir than about making his son happy again.

The meaning of the son's wandering in the Buddhist tale is that there is no initial position to lose in one's spiritual becoming. As the son leaves his home poor and remains poor, humans have no other inheritance than karma, which makes them wander from one bad incarnation to another. The only truth that governs human existence is suffering and karma, which leads to an endless wandering in the world with no original position to return to. The only spiritual fulfillment is a permanent growth toward an impersonal liberation. This is the Buddhist treasure to be discovered by any cost.

The Way Back Home

The prodigal son of the gospel finally "came to his senses" and acknowledged his dramatic condition. Ashamed, he planned to return to his father, confess his sin, and ask to be hired as a servant. This position, no matter how humiliating it could be in front of his brother and the other servants, was a much better choice than staying with the pigs.

The process of one's "coming to his senses" is called repentance in Christian theology. It involves acknowledging the bad condition of living in sin and making the decision to leave it. * The Buddhist prodigal son made no decision to return to his father. He continuously wandered from town to town until he unexpectedly arrived at his father's palace. The son didn't even recognize his father, whose situation had changed a lot since his departure. More than this, the father's wealth inspired fear in the son and made him try to run away again in order to not enter into more trouble. Eventually, at the father's command, the attendants seized him and brought him to the palace against his will.

The son's wandering in the world can be interpreted as the effect of karma and reincarnation in one's life. They constantly push man on the one-way of becoming. However, long the process of being reincarnated in different bodies may be, one has to finally reach liberation (that's why the attendants seize the son against his will). One constantly experiences suffering until he has to accept that the best solution for his life is nirvana. Although reaching the status of a bodhisattva (a being that helps other humans attain liberation) seems to confer a personal afterlife destiny, the ultimate stage of becoming is shunya, the void, where nothing personal can remain.

What Happens Back Home?

According to Luke's parable, the father was waiting for his prodigal son. He probably knew that the son couldn't find true satisfaction in what the world had to offer him. Instead of punishing him for his foolish behavior, "while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him" (v. 20). Instead of humiliating the son as a repayment for the shame he cast on his father at departure, the father humiliates himself by running to meet him. Such a behavior was totally undignified according to Jewish standards of the time. After the son recited half of his prepared speech,

acknowledging he was wrong, the father interrupted him and commanded the servants to bring him the best robe, put a ring on his finger, and sandals on his feet. The fattened calf was slaughtered and a feast ordered to celebrate his return. All these symbols prove a 100% forgiveness and rehabilitation of the son to his prior status. The robe was a sign of great distinction, the ring the sign of authority, the sandals a luxury (only slaves were bare-footed), and the slaughter of the fattened calf the sign of a very important celebration in the family. Instead of becoming a hired servant as he hoped, the son was fully restored to the position he had abandoned long before. The Sutra presents in a whole different way the prodigal son's return home. The father unexpectedly recognized him standing at his gate and sent his attendants to seize him and compel him to come to the palace. The son didn't understand the situation and became terrified. The father initially treated him like a stranger because of his "inferior disposition". A sudden restoration was out of the question. Understanding his son's mindset, the father set him free and that he be hired as a scavenger. Although filled with compassion, the father could not reveal his identity until the son deserved his proper place in the family.

He met his son in disguise and encouraged him to be honest in his work in order to be promoted. He promised to increase his salary and provide for his basic needs. The son had first to prove high qualities before being accepted back into the family. So he lived for 20 years in a small hut while still being employed in scavenging. The testing process would have probably continued if the father hadn't become ill, feeling his death to be imminent. Even at this time the son was not fully accepted into the family but only promoted to a higher position, that of accountant over all his father's riches. Without abandoning his sense of inferiority, the son became acquainted with all the goods. Noticing that his son's ideas had gradually changed for the good and that he despised his former status, only then did the father gather all his relatives and friends and declare the former servant to be his son and heir.

The Teaching of the Parable in Christianity and Buddhism

The Christian meaning of the parable is clear. All humans need to return to God in repentance and faith. He does not compel humans to do it, so it must be a personal decision. God's forgiveness is not conditioned by attaining high spiritual performances but only by repentance. Jesus Christ paid the price for our reconciliation with God through His death on the cross and His resurrection. There is nothing more to add and one life is enough to accept it.

The parable depicts the amazing availability of God to forgive and restore us, His unlimited grace to bestow upon us, His great love to accept us independently of our status and past. This should give us courage to come to Him in repentance and faith, without fear, and inherit His Kingdom, where personal communion with Him will be everlasting. * The Buddhist parable has a different message. Both the process of being liberated (acknowledged as son) and the meaning of liberation (inheriting the father's estate) have a different meaning. One cannot simply attain liberation at once. The process is very long and demands a progressive accumulation of wisdom until one deserves his place in the hierarchy. Escaping from ignorance and suffering, attaining nirvana, and the becoming of a bodhisattva is a hard-to-win prize that has to be attained gradually by a day-by-day effort in training the mind and overcoming karma. Grace, in Buddhism, cannot be shown directly, but only as the disciple deserves it, which in fact is no grace at all. There is also a major difference from Christianity in defining the status of the liberated person. Personhood has no room in the system. Although the bodhisattva is a personal being, he acts as a temporary catalyst for the sake of other humans that they may also find nirvana. The true ultimate stage of spiritual progress is shunya, the void, where no personal communion can ever exist. It is the final blowing out of the candle. This means that an eternal communion with a Father in His Kingdom makes no sense in traditional

Buddhism. Ultimately, there is no Father to have communion with.

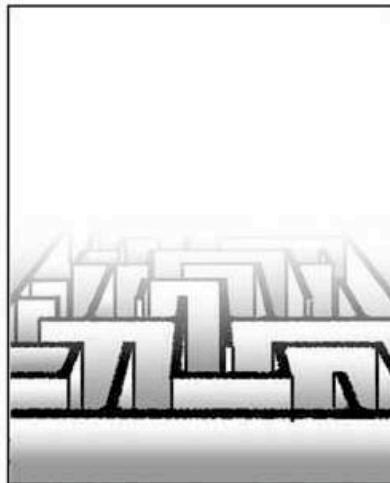
The following table summarizes the teaching of the two parables and also reveals

TOPIC	MEANING IN CHRISTIANITY	MEANING IN BUDDHISM
<i>The context</i>	Jesus is teaching sinners, emphasizing their need and opportunity to be reconciled with God.	Buddha is teaching spiritually advanced disciples (<i>arhats</i>) the need for attaining a higher position, that of a <i>bodhisattva</i> .
<i>The characters</i>	God and the sinners.	Buddha (the ultimate impersonal Buddha nature) and the ones struggling to attain it.
<i>The meaning of the son's departure from home</i>	The human attitude of rebellion against God, called sin.	The human attitude of rebellion against God, Ignorance starts the wheel of karma.
<i>The son's miserable condition</i>	The human condition under the power of sin, away from personal communion with God.	Karma and reincarnation force one to wander from one physical existence to the next.
<i>The decision to return home</i>	A personal decision to leave sin, called repentance.	Karma and reincarnation lead one to the proper level where wisdom and spiritual progress can be attained.
<i>The father's attitude at the son's arrival</i>	Complete forgiveness of sin and restoration to personal fellowship with God.	Buddha's "grace" makes one progress little by little toward liberation. One has to deserve his position by a process of spiritual development.
<i>Who pays the damage for the lost fortune</i>	God, the Son incarnated as Jesus Christ, paid the price for our forgiveness through His death and resurrection.	The disciple has to "pay himself" the price for erasing his ignorance, by constantly accumulating wisdom.
<i>The son's inheritance</i>	Eternal communion with God in His kingdom.	Attaining an impersonal Ultimate Reality (<i>shunya</i>), where there is no room for personal communion.

MAZEING RECOVERY

COMPANY

BY JOE A.



Problems with Prayer

Overcoming the Intellectualization of Prayer

Many people arrive in AA with a bias against the custom of saying prayers, or at least the prayers common in the Program and Meetings.

For the Christian Objection

Many Christians take the injunction against memorized or dictated prayers seriously. This is found in the New Testament in Mark 6:4 and 6:5

“And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”

When the groups perform the “Serenity Prayer,” “The Lord’s Prayer,” or the “St. Francis Prayer,” many are simply showing the willingness to participate in the ritual of opening or closing a meeting.

It is not prayer – it is ritual and extends the comfort of a predictability to approach the serious work of Recovery.

They do not know they are not praying, but many use this avenue to find their way to faith while confronting the pain and crisis created by alcoholism.

Most meetings allow for personal prayer in silence, but your participation is an act of willing submission to the process of Spiritual Awakening, which is the only result of the Twelfth Step and the effect for which we work, regardless of your specific beliefs of a Spiritual life.

For the Non-Christian Objection

Alcoholics began as part of a Christian organization, the Oxford Groups. When asked to provide a “Christmas Message” for the Grapevine in 1953, Bill Wilson responded by saying:

“The more I thought it over the more I got buffaloed. I said, “Gee, this society of ours has moved into every quarter of the Earth. Here a great many of us are Christians. A good many are not. We have Jews who look to Jehovah. Out on the plains we have Indians who look to the Great Spirit. And now that we have established beachheads in the Pacific Islands, in Asia, in India, in South Africa... We know that we have brothers and sisters who look to Allah, and some to Buddha.”

And I thought to myself, “How can anybody possibly talk about Christmas to all these?”

Then came this thought, “Well, by whatever name we call it, we of AA have Christmas every day. In the sense that we give and in the sense that we receive.”

Yes. The kind of giving that demands no reward.

The kind of loving that bears no price tag.

---- Bill Wilson, 1953

At his 18th Anniversary

When AA separated from the Oxford Group, the invitation to Recovery took the form of a Higher Power,” “a God of your understanding,” which can be the god of your own faith.

Some people think the AA program is trying to convert everyone to a specific religion. Religion is not the job of AA – faith is the job of the person in Recovery and is between them and their personal Higher Power.

For the Non-Believer Objection

Contrary to propaganda spread about Alcoholics Anonymous as a religious front; those who do not believe, or actively do not believe, are welcome and invited into the rooms.

We would not be in AA if we had not already experienced enough of a change to know that the ideas we had proved false and did not keep us sober. On page 52 of the Big Book, after outlining the various forms of suffering our unmanageable lives had presented to us:

“Was not a basic solution of these bedevils more important than whether we should see newsreels of lunar flight? Of course it was.”

Page 52

Many Christians object to the prayers, as well, because their faith tells them to pray from the heart, not based on set, scripted prayers.

Prayers are a custom going back to the time of AA’s formation as part of the Oxford Groups. To say the words of the prayer is not praying, any more than saying the Pledge of Allegiance was pledging the flag or the country. As a child, I was required to say the Pledge of Allegiance because that was the way my school day started.

There are also many people for whom the Prayer and the Pledge are genuinely of whom they are or what they believe.

For those of us who have long worship at the altar of the Human Brain, intellectual pride can be sufficient to keep us drunk. We have seen non-believers stay sober based on their personal knowledge that they are not the greatest power of the Universe, particularly when we had spent so much of our lives acting as if we were.

Saying the Prayer is not intellectual hypocrisy, it is the concession that staying sober is more important than intellectual pride; that finding the new life is more important than “being right.”

Those who do not have a faith, or are very actively against the very concept of any religion, may have a more difficult job to gain and sustain long-term sobriety. Our egos may push us to stop drinking for months, or even years, but we can be guaranteed that life will provide some punches that will require more than our solitary mental prowess can muster.

Many people that come to AA use the rooms (the body of people who stay sober) as their Power Greater than Themselves. They could do together what we failed to do alone and they were a visible resource for those of us who cannot, or will not, concede the core of “spiritual.”

Turning back to our favorite reference, dictionary.com, we find several entries for “spiritual”:

Dictionary Definition of “Spiritual”

spir·it·u·al [spir-i-choo-uhl] Show IPA
-adjective

1. *of, pertaining to, or consisting of spirit; incorporeal.*
2. *of or pertaining to the spirit or soul, as distinguished from the physical nature: a spiritual approach to life.*

3. *closely akin in interests, attitude, outlook, etc.: the professor's spiritual heir in linguistics.*
4. *of or pertaining to spirits or to spiritualists; supernatural or spiritualistic.*
5. *characterized by or suggesting predominance of the spirit; ethereal or delicately refined: She is more of a spiritual type than her rowdy brother.*
6. *of or pertaining to the spirit as the seat of the moral or religious nature.*
7. *of or pertaining to sacred things or matters; religious; devotional; sacred.*
8. *of or belonging to the church; ecclesiastical: lords spiritual and temporal.*
9. *of or relating to the mind or intellect.*
-noun
10. *a spiritual or religious song: authentic folk spirituals.*
11. *spirituals, affairs of the church.*
12. *a spiritual thing or matter.*

For our purpose, many meanings of the word can apply, but it is the first definition that we feel best serves the understanding of “spirit” as presented through the Program.

- “1. *of, pertaining to, or consisting of spirit; incorporeal.*”

A feature of AA Recovery that has proved a serious obstacle for intellectuals in the Program has been the necessary concession that there are things in our life that are not subject to discussion under the laws of physics and our understanding of the material world.

We find a level of coincidence far beyond statistical norms, which guide us to the next correction phase of our life and Recovery that becomes increasingly difficult to accept as random chance.

We find harmonics of situations in meetings with what we encounter in the world that becomes almost eerie.

We find that when we do the Program the way the Program says to do it, we find periods of unexplainable comfort, serenity, and sometimes joy or happiness where we should logically be free of such elevation in emotional response.

Over time, we realize our ability to understand our own reality is limited. The human brain cannot adequately classify or reduce reality to understandable terms.

Religious people have a way that works for them, regardless of our judgment of their beliefs. For them, “God did it” is a perfectly acceptable answer.

Perhaps we can end the intellectual war by simply admitting “it happened” and remain open to learning, experiencing, and possibly, understanding more as time goes on.

There is a limit to understanding as it affects the real world. If you fall off a high building, understanding gravity does not change the rate at which you fall.

Many things simply are. They exist and can have effects on our lives, emotions, and our place in the world, without supplying an answer for our ever-questioning brain.

Intellectual alcoholics love to judge things as “good” or “bad,” but in Recovery we are bombarded with realities that defy our judgment – so we are faced with a dilemma.

Do we accept a reality we cannot understand, which gives us health, joy, and belonging, or do we insist on rejecting the reality of Recovery to the small part we can classify and remain isolated, risking Recovery in favor of an imagined superiority?

When you stand in the room and say the words to the prayer, or simply stand with the other people in the group as they say the prayer, you are

really in a room of AA, really with people who have shared the pain of your experience and who are willing to share their Recovery with you.

Why fight?

A Different Idea of God as an Higher Power

Some people have a serious problem with religion or what has previously been presented to them as “God.”

It is sometimes suggested that a newcomer use the group as a Higher Power because the men and women in that group can do what the newcomer can't. Stay sober. They come to understand “God” as “Good Orderly Direction” or “Group of Drunks.”

Some say the struggling newcomer should accept some inanimate object as their higher power. The idea is not to worship that item but to stop worshiping your own brain and desires as the force that rules reality. As one old-timer said, “It gets your life out of the hands of the idiot who's had it so far!”

The key is to give up the idea that the newcomer is God, or gets to decide how the world should be. The idea is willing submission, whether someone else agrees with their conception of a Higher Power or not. It is a move in the necessary direction.

There is another suggestion. Completely unofficial, of course. The person objecting to the “God” aspect begins their prayer as “God, in whom I do not know if I will ever believe...” and then say the prayer.

In the **Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions**, the Serenity Prayer ends with “Thy will, not mine, be done.”

Your definition of “thy” is based your personal conception of God, the Power Greater Than Yourself.

The Lord's Prayer

An Interpretation from the Aramaic

Although we know the prayer was written in Greek (a trader's dialect called "Kohlne"), the words were first spoken in the era's native language of Aramaic.

Aramaic has its own structure, grammar, and cultural references; there are no words for colors, but comparisons to things of that color. There is no word for daily; the two syllable word for God-the-Father is a source of intense debate as to the complexity of the meaning. Over twenty translations can be found on the web.

TRANSLATION KEY

Italic Bold – Aramaic

In Parentheses – (King James Standard)

Bulleted – • Translations

Ahwûn

(Our Father)

- * My Source/Creator
- * O cosmic Birther, from whom the breath of life comes
- * Radiance that Saturates the universe

D'bwaschmâja

(Who art in Heaven)

- * That fills/saturates the universe, above and below
- * That who fills all realms of sound, light, and vibration
- * That who is all of substance and vibration

In Aramaic, ideas can merge or interact with the words before or after to deepen the meaning.

I say that I expected to be thrown out of AA because

- a) I don't smoke cigarettes,
- b) I don't drink coffee, and
- c) I'm not a Christian.

When asked why I say the Lord's Prayer at the end of the meeting, it is because of what the prayer says!

Nethkâdasch schmachv

(Hallowed be Thy Name)

- * Your name is already sacred
- * May Your light be experienced in my utmost holiest
- * allow me to see / know / believe

Têtê malkuthach.

(Thy Kingdom Come)

- * Your Heavenly Domain approaches
- * Your Justice approaches
- * Your Will is already being done in Heaven

Nehwê tzevjânach aikâna d'bwaschmâja af bârha.

(Thy Will be done on Earth as it is In Heaven)

- * Let Your Will be true on earth (that is material and dense) just as it is in the universe (all that vibrates)

- * Your will is already being done within the Earth as it is already being done in the heavens

Hawvlân lachma. d'sûnkanân yaomâna

(Give us this day Our Daily Bread³)

- Give us wisdom (understanding, assistance) according to our need
- * Sustain/Nourish me

Waschboklân chaubêñ wachtahêñ aikâna daf chnân schwoken l'chajabêñ.

(And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors)

- * Forgive me and my wrongs to the extent I am able to give forgiveness to others.

Wela tachlân l'nesjuna

(And Lead us Not into Temptation)

- * Let us not be lost in superficial things (materialism, common temptations)
- * Free me from desire or free me from lies/ illusion
- * Please do not put me to the test
- * Detach the fetters of faults that bind us, just as we let go the guilt we hold of others
- * Allow me the same forgiveness to others as you are already showing to me

Ela patzân min bischa

(But deliver us from Evil)

- * But let us be freed from that what keeps us off from our true purpose
- * Be my direction / purpose

Metol dilachie malkutha wahaila wateschbuchta

(For thine is the kingdom and the power)

- * From you comes the all-working will, the vital strength to act
- * You are the source of the song that is life.

Lâhlâm almîn

(and the Glory Forever and Ever)

- * Sealed in trust, faith and truth
- * I confirm with my entire being
- * As you are truly the only god and deserving of all my worship

Amêin – (Amen)

The word Amen (Tiberian Hebrew “Amein” pronounced ah-MAIN, Arabic “Amin” pronounced AH-men) translates as “So may it be” or “Truly” and is a declaration of affirmation found in the Hebrew Bible, the New testament, and the Qur'an. It also has come to mean “As it is”, “Verily”, “I agree”, “Let it be,” or “Well said.”

It was used by the Jewish congregation to affirm the words said by the leader of the worship. It was later adopted by the Christians from the Jews as the concluding formula for a prayer. In the Islam it is the standard ending to the sutras (Chapters or divisions).

Drawn from over 20 sources of Aramaic translations found through internet searches, some of the more academic repute than others. By reading several different versions of a translation, you can get an idea of the real meaning within the original document.

³ There is no reference of time in Aramaic, so daily is not a concept - it is always “today.”

The Peace Prayer of St. Francis

by Dr. Christian Renoux, Associate Professor of the University of Orleans, France

Original Text of the Peace Prayer

Belle prière à faire pendant la Messe

Seigneur, faites de moi un instrument de votre paix.

Là où il y a de la haine, que je mette l'amour.

Là où il y a l'offense, que je mette le pardon.

Là où il y a la discorde, que je mette l'union.

Là où il y a l'erreur, que je mette la vérité.

Là où il y a le doute, que je mette la foi.

Là où il y a le désespoir, que je mette l'espérance.

Là où il y a les ténèbres, que je mette votre lumière.

Là où il y a la tristesse, que je mette la joie.

Ô Maître, que je ne cherche pas tant à être consolé qu'à consoler,

à être compris qu'à comprendre,

à être aimé qu'à aimer,

car c'est en donnant qu'on reçoit,

c'est en s'oubliant qu'on trouve,

c'est en pardonnant qu'on est pardonné,

c'est en mourant qu'on ressuscite à l'éternelle vie.

Source: La Clochette, n° 12, déc. 1912, p. 285.

Origin of this Prayer

The first appearance of the Peace Prayer occurred in France in 1912 in a small spiritual magazine called La Clochette (The Little Bell). It

was published in Paris by a Catholic association known as La Ligue de la Sainte-Messe (The Holy Mass League), founded in 1901 by a French priest, Father Esther Bouquerel (1855-1923). The prayer bore the title of 'Belle prière à faire pendant la messe' (A Beautiful Prayer to Say During the Mass), and was published anonymously. The author could possibly have been Father Bouquerel himself, but the identity of the author remains a mystery.

The prayer was sent in French to Pope Benedict XV in 1915 by the French Marquis Stanislas de La Rochethulon. This was soon followed by its 1916 appearance, in Italian, in L'Osservatore Romano [the Vatican's daily newspaper]. Around 1920, the prayer was printed by a French Franciscan priest on the back of an image of St. Francis with the title 'Prière pour la paix' (Prayer for Peace) but without being attributed to the saint. Between the two world wars, the prayer circulated in Europe and was translated into English. It was attributed for the first time to Saint Francis in 1927 by a French Protestant Movement, Les Chevaliers du Prince de la Paix (The Knights of the Prince of Peace), founded by Étienne Bach (1892-1986).

The first translation in English that we know of appeared in 1936 in Living Courageously, a book by Kirby Page (1890-1957), a Disciple of Christ minister, pacifist, social evangelist, writer, and editor of The World Tomorrow (New York City). Page clearly attributed the text to St. Francis of Assisi. During World War II and immediately

after, this prayer for peace began circulating widely as the Prayer of St. Francis, especially through Francis cardinal Spellman's books, and over the years has gained a worldwide popularity with people of all faiths.

For more information, see the book by Dr. Christian Renoux, *La prière pour la paix attribuée à saint François: une énigme à résoudre*, Paris, Editions franciscaines, 2001, 210 p.: 12.81 euros + shipping (ISBN: 2-85020-096-4). – Order From: Éditions franciscaines, 9, rue Marie-Rose F-75014 Paris.

Note: Dr. Christian Renoux, is continuing his research on the propagation of this prayer, and is looking for new information about its publication in English between 1925 and 1945, and in all other languages between 1912 and today. Our thanks to Dr. Renoux for his permission to publish the Original Text of this very popular Prayer and the history of its origin.

How to Not Meditate

*There are only
Two ways to fail.
To not complete, or
To not begin.*

-- Buddhist saying

This is not an official or authorized document. It is a reflection on the varieties for the practice of developing a quiet mind for spiritual growth and inner peace.

Meditation is not something you do.
Meditation is the things you do not do.
Meditation is not magic.
Meditation is tuning into yourself like a radio where the radio no longer picks up the desired station.
Meditation is not scientific.
Meditation is finding an inner calm and spiritual guidance.
There is no official form of Meditation.
Meditation is more than one tool for meditation.
Some Meditation practices are complex and based on a single, approved form of spirituality.
Beginner's Meditations must be simple.
Religions and beliefs have a tradition of Meditation as part of its Practice.
Catholics have the Rosary.
Protestants have group prayers and weekly schedules.

Monks and nuns of all faiths have beads and chants.

Hindus have the centering techniques of Yoga.

Moslems have the trance dancing dervishes.

Native Americans have traditions of vision quests and time in quiet contemplation.

Atheists have their personal routines or areas of thought.

They all work.

Find the style and method that works best for you.

Do Not Try to Find God While Meditating.

Think of being young and going to a store. It may be the grocery store with your mother, an aunt, or some other grown-up. It may have been to a department store, the fair, a school event, or a festival.

If you were to get separated from the adult, the worst thing you can do is go looking for them.

You might miss each other if both of you are moving.

Sit still and wait for them to find you.

And they will find you.

While you are waiting, you can be calm and secure that they are searching for you and you are making yourself findable.

You are lost – not God, no matter how you understand God.

If you become still and stay right here, right now, you give yourself the chance to be found.

You make yourself "Findable."

And you are safe, no matter what is going on in your life.

Ways to Meditate

Meditation requires a dedicated time spent with your chosen practice and repetition. A simple timer can set limits on the time spent meditating – a watch alarm, a kitchen timer, etc.

You can meditate alone or with others – both ways have value.

You can meditate being still or moving. Some people meditate best sitting in a natural setting with no agenda; others find a strict liturgy leads to mental and emotional liberation.

None of these are required, but you can choose parts of any of them to improve your personal meditation.

Many people have been meditating for years and not even known it. They have something they do that provides repetition and makes them comfortable exactly where they are, doing what they are doing.

They often look forward to it, not understanding why it gives them such a sense of peace.

Meditation can be sitting still or it can be moving.

Meditation can be doing nothing or doing something.

Meditation can be meaningful contemplation of an image, a verse, or a saying; or sitting looking inward at a memory of such an idea.

Meditation can be an effortless stepping away from stress and worry.

Meditation can be found in a favorite incense, the fragrance a certain flower, or appreciating the aroma of your favorite cup of coffee.

Meditation can be listening to a particular type of music, or singing.

Meditation can be watching a favorite image, scene, or the abstract movement in stream of water or lava lamp.

Meditation can be performing a task; gardening, knitting, dancing, drawing, working a potter's wheel, building a wall, cooking, running, or riding a bicycle.

You will discover the form that gives you the best calm. Begin with a few suggestions, and even when you find your favorite way to meditate, try other ways as well.

You can always discover a new answer that does not make the old answer wrong, but enriches you by giving you more than one channel.

A Simple Beginning

There is no required decoration, devices, furniture, or approved chant for meditation – but someone you know may have a suggestion from their own practice.

Find a spot to be comfortable, or at least more comfortable than you are normally. At times, this may not be completely comfortable, particularly in the beginning. Someone may suggest a position, a posture, or something else they use for their own meditation.

Determine a way to limit your beginning meditation – a timer, a specific length of music, or other indicator. Later, you may want to sit and meditate for as long as you feel focused and relaxed.

You may start in a quiet setting; a room, a spot outdoors where you will not be disturbed, or even sitting in a car. Later, you will be able to meditate anywhere, regardless of noise or distraction.

You may start with a familiar movement; walking, running, gardening, knitting, cooking, singing, reading, or whatever gives you the most quiet.

Don't expect anything. If you do expect something, don't criticize yourself or try to make

yourself wrong for having the expectation. Simply notice it and understand you are trying something new and may have no experience in how to 'not expect.' You aren't meditating to criticize yourself.

You can sit, or begin the motion as you feel most comfortable. In the beginning, it is usually suggested that you not lay down to relax. You could easily go to sleep and it is not the purpose of meditation to bring on sleep.

Start with one thing -

a smell,

a sound,

a motion,

a passage or verse for contemplation.

If moving, how long do you want to be doing your movement (not where you will go or the product of your action)?

The Meditation

Don't worry about the past or project into the future.

Concentrate on the moment you are in – right now, right here.

Try to notice things without "thinking" "about them.

Notice your breathing.

Notice the sounds around you.

Notice what you see.

Notice the smells.

Notice the tastes.

Notice the feel of air brushing against your skin or the cloth against your skin.

But try to not "think" about any of them. Avoid thinking if they are good or bad, pleasant or annoying, useful or beautiful – just notice them, as they are.

If you should accidentally start thinking, that is not bad. Just notice that you are thinking about something and try to get your attention back to the experience of being aware of this exact moment.

Maybe you will have someone come to you and want to talk while you are being quiet. That means that as part of your "now" you have someone who wants to talk to you. It may be about something for their own benefit, but you have someone who wants to talk to you.

Was that always true?

Successful Meditation

With successful meditation you simplify your life to the exact moment where you are.

You will find a new starting point in "here" and "now."

You will discover that every moment in your life has had a "here" and "now," but you missed them because of thoughts of "there" and "then."

You will find a new ability to recognize new answers, the ability to change directions with less stress, and the serenity that comes without.

We will notice the lost opportunities of the past without criticism or judgment. Simply notice the difference between a life lived in the "there" and "then," and a new life lived in the "here" and "now."

If we remember the idea being lost in a store, you will discover how to meditate to make yourself "findable" to your own Higher Power, or God as you understand God.

"we will understand the word serenity, and we will know peace..."

Page 84

MAZEING RECOVERY

THE NEWER-COMER

BY JOE A.



Prayers from the Big Book

"I earnestly advise every alcoholic to read this book through, and though perhaps he came to scoff, he may remain to pray."

William D. Silkworth, MD - Page xxx

"God is everything or He is nothing. God either is or He isn't. What was our choice to be?"

Page 53

We asked His protection and care with complete abandon.

Page 59

Third Step

God, I offer myself to Thee - to build with me and do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love and Thy Way of Life. May I do Thy will always!

Page 63

Fourth Step

RESENTMENT

We asked God to help us show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend. When a person offended we said to ourselves, "This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done".

Page 67

FEAR

We ask Him to remove our fear and direct our attention to what He would have us be.

Page 68

SEX

We asked God to mold our ideals and help us live up to them.

Page 69

In meditation, we ask God what we do about each specific matter.

Page 69

To sum up about sex: We pray for the right ideal, for guidance in each questionable situation, for sanity and for strength to do the right thing.

Page 70

Fifth Step

We thank God from the bottom of our heart that we know Him better.

Page 75

We ask if we have omitted anything.

Page 75

Sixth Step

If we still cling to something we will not let go, we ask God to help us be willing.

Page 76

Seventh Step

My Creator, I am now willing that You should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that You now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do Your bidding. Amen

Page 76

Eighth Step

If we haven't the will to do this, we ask until it comes.

Page 76

Ninth Step

LEGAL MATTERS

We ask that we be given strength and direction to do the right thing, no matter what the personal consequences might be.

Page 79

OTHERS EFFECTED

If we have obtained permission, have consulted with others, asked God to help.

Page 80

INFIDELITY

Each might pray about it, having the other one's happiness uppermost in mind.

Page 82

FAMILY

So we clean house with the family, asking each morning in meditation that our Creator show us the way of patience, tolerance, kindliness and love.

Page 83

Tenth Step

Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment and fear. When these crop up, we ask God at once to remove them.

Page 84

Everyday is a day when we must carry the vision of God's will into all our activities. "How can I best serve Thee - Thy will (not mine) be done".

Page 85

Eleventh Step

NIGHT

After mediation on the day just completed, "We ask God's forgiveness and inquire what corrective measures should be taken".

Page 86

MORNING

Before we begin our day, "we ask god to direct our thinking, especially asking that it be divorced from self-pity... dishonest or self-seeking motives".

Page 86

In thinking about our day, "We ask God for inspiration, an intuitive thought or decision".

Page 87

We usually conclude the period of mediation with a prayer that we be shown all through the day what our next step is to be, that we be given whatever we need to take care of such problems. We especially ask for freedom from self-will, and are careful to make no requests for ourselves only We may ask for ourselves, however, if others will be helped. We are careful never to pray for our own selfish ends.

Page 86

ALL DAY

As we go through the day we pause, when agitated or doubtful, and ask for the right thought or action.

Page 87 - 88

Twelfth Step

Ask Him in your morning meditation what you can do each day for the man who is still sick. The answers will come IF your own house is in order.

Page 164

Your job now is to be at the place where you may be of maximum helpfulness to others, so never hesitate to go anywhere if you can be helpful. You should not hesitate to visit the most sordid spot on earth on such an errand. Keep on the firing line of life with these motives and God will keep you unharmed.

Page 102

But Remember...

The wording was, of course, quite optional so long as we expressed the idea, voicing it without reservation.

Page 63

When ready, we say something like this...

Page 76

Prayers recited like magic incantations can have little effect. We must pray from our heart, with all the honesty and willingness to mean exactly what we say.

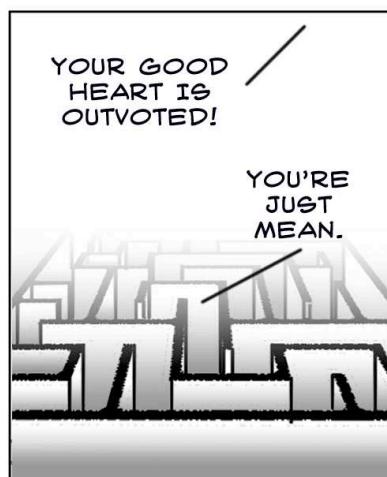
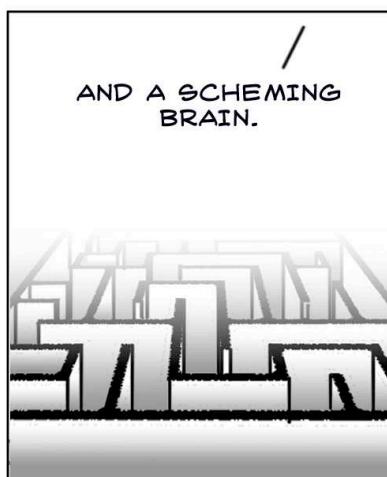
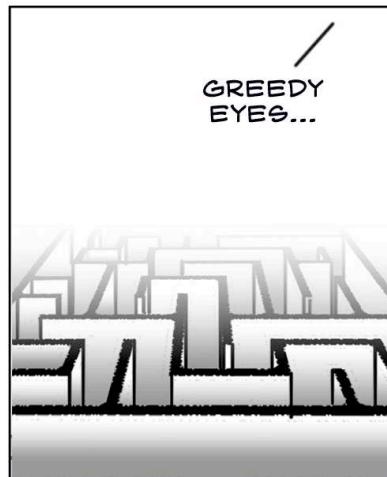
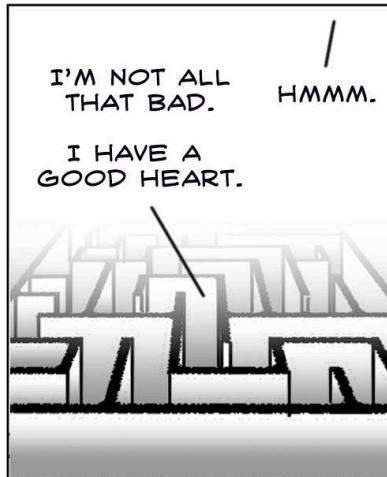
It works, if we work it.

We will die, if we don't.

MAZEING RECOVERY

A GOOD HEART

BY JOE A.



Living in the Body of God

A PERSONAL MEDITATION

It always begins the same way.

In Christianity.

In Buddhism.

In the Jewish Bible.

In the Koran.

In the tribal stories.

There was nothing.

Then there was something.

There was the Word.

There was the Song.

There was the Dream.

Even science suggests – there was nothing, then there was the Big Bang.

The moment of being, the beginning, is the one God saying “Be!” but not in the feeble scope of a word in English.

Everything began, and that instant of glorious and incomprehensible change, the origin, the being is what we call God, Ra, Ahuramazda, Yahweh, Jehovah, Allah, Ram, Manitou, Wakan ..., the thousand names and faces of the God-Who-is-All. It is God-Who-is-All as we each can understand that word. It is all the faces of the universe waiting to smile on us when, at last, we open our eyes.

Nothing exists outside that moment of creation and cannot exist outside of God-Who-is-All.

We live within the living body of the one God-Who-is-All.

One God. Not two. Not God and Satan. Satan is unnecessary. Everything we can point to as Evil has been done by humans for their own reasons. One God, all-encompassing, and whose motion and design will forever remain beyond human kind.

Men create evil and force others to live through their created evil. They are there because others invested in the power that was to have been used for their direct contact to the God-Who-is-All. They have surrendered their truth in a grab for power, for comfort, for righteousness sake, and for greed of gold, of flesh, or of pride.

They may claim the Devil tempted them, but they performed the actions of evil.

Hurricanes are not evil.

Floods are not evil.

Lightning is not evil.

Decay is not evil.

Death is not evil.

It is the flow established by what we call God, by whatever name. It is the natural flow to begin, to flourish, to decline, and end to make way for the next cycle and next generations.

How this was accomplished will remain the Mystery. Science will project and speculate and theorize to try to reduce the all-existence of ‘God’

to something our tiny brains can feel that they can contain, but the Mystery will remain. Theologians will populate the universe with a face or name or names or symbols or restrictions on the all-beingness of 'God,' but the Mystery will expand their greatest explanations.

It has never been our purpose or our capacity to understand the God-Who-is-All.

It will never be our domain to comprehend the complexity of the All, but as humans we have a need to feel we have understanding and truth.

As humans, there is a place for each of us within the universe. It is not on the top or on the bottom, but it is perfectly shaped for us. We already live there, but deny our place in the universe by will and desire.

There is no "God-sized hole" within us for God to fill. There is a whole the exact size and shape of each of us for us to recognize as our place in the God-Who-is-All.

We concoct stories, fables, parables, myths, artificial histories, and sometimes, populations of supporting spirits, angels, demons, and other fantasies to explain what will always remain beneath the abject totality of the God-Who-is-All.

One God, one universal truth of change and flow that transcends time or geography, available to all who seek that contact, which we are taught to deny from infancy.

"Be Still and Know that I am God," we were told.

"Before Abraham was, I am," we were told.

There was no design of separation, whatever those who would ensure privilege say to the populations who were raised to honor the society of men instead of the God-Who-is-All.

The way of what is a flow we can find to be Love. Through trial and victory and sickness and passion, there is a flow that carries us through the stream of time to our fate, and the whole of that

span of time is within the body of the God-Who-is-All from the moment before existence to the moment after the death of time.

God is the medium through which we exist in the same way the river is the medium through which a fish lives, or the sky is the medium of the birds. We are saturated by the God-Who-is-All because we are part of the flow started with that first moment.

We can only understand sin as the separation of ourselves from the God-Who-is-All by our will and belief of individual power. Separation from the source, or the illusion of separation, creates hunger for completion that expresses itself in greed and lust and fear and the other familiar deadly sins.

No amount of accumulation in the transient world can satisfy the hunger or the emptiness the separation creates. Perhaps we can be numbed, lulled into a comfortable illusion for a while. We can raise our children in delusion that this physical accumulation is happiness, but each generation will seek its own solution to the emptiness the separation creates.

If the God-Who-is-All does not saturate everything and everyone and everywhen, how is it that any man, woman, or child that finds the need to connect with the God-Who-is-All can make that contact to the greater pattern of what is true, and find fulfillment in their proper place in the universe, giving and receiving as part of the intended flow?

They are already there.

Who does God not love? Where is the child born of man or animal that is not part of this saturated God-Who-is-All? Who can defy the will and design of the God-Who-is-All to be part of the greater reality; even though that reality is beyond any conception we can contain in our tiny little skulls with the even smaller little brains within. That which is love and harmony is present

in every cell and stone and wind, though it may defy our attempt to define what that love and harmony 'should' be. The fantasy that people must never hurt, that hearts must never be broken, that loved ones will never suffer or die without an understandable reason, is part of that flow and our need for explanation is not God's need to explain.

Who can hurt God? Who has the power to change any of the true being of the universe by an act of will, a device, or a philosophy? The belief that we can defy God is an illusion that creates its own suffering in separation from the God-Who-is-All. We can only create the illusion of separation from God, but we are still part of the God-Who-is-All, despite our desire or understanding.

Who can disappoint God? To believe that we have somehow failed to live to some fantasized destiny only serves to hurt ourselves. The God-Who-is-All will flow forward while we fight the low. We fight until we are exhausted and fall into that communion of bliss with the God-Who-is-All, or do some self-destructive action that still does not deprive the God-Who-is-All of our breath and body.

Who can argue to get God-Who-is-All to change the reality (as if the idea of the speck of a being within this great river of time to change its flow), to make it flow uphill because of a petty desire or defiant design? Within the flow of the God-Who-is-All is the path, the freedom is ours to participate in that low to fulfill the part we are there to lay, or resist that flow and cause ourselves the suffering of our own defiance. The God-Who-is-All will accomplish the flow with another raised up to take the role you have refused; that new one will enjoy the path and belonging and peace that should have been your own.

You are given your way to approach the God-Who-is-All and by your expression of surrender and suppression of defiant will, you can approach by the face you care able to understand. When

people rise up to force others to believe only as their own personal understanding of contact expresses their contact with the God-Who-is-All, their adventuring beyond their own direct contact is a flurry of defiance that will generate everything that we call Evil, they will pass and the flow will go on.

Where is there to go after you die? You already live within the very body of the God to whom you think you pray and to whom you go? You are already there. Matter cannot be created or destroyed within the creation, so the fabric of your body will continue throughout time. Your breath may leave your lungs, but your last exhalation will continue for eternity. That which has been your separated personality rejoins the body of God to which it already belongs, made greater in the joining. It is the great unknown of the soul, as we perceive the soul – the migration to Paradise or Perdition, as we have been taught. Who would willingly keep himself from the belonging and tranquility of serving as is your own personal role and discovering your fulfillment here and now?

Our effort and support of each other expresses our fate. When life is based on desire, fear, and desperate accumulation for satisfaction, then what need is there for a Hell if the life you have been given is separated from the God-Who-is-All?

What need is there for Hell when we have kept ourselves apart from the God-Who-is-All? The life lived for self is punishment incarnate, to waste the moments we have fearing we will never possess that which will make us whole, when the whole of reality is ours for the Surrender, is the separation that is the very Hell we fear.

What need is there for Heaven when the life lived in acceptance and service is the reward of the worthy life? To find peace that the trials and torments of childhood are the bag-gage of the preceding lives, and find the freedom to choose the new way, is the Bliss we seek. To be in the proper position of giving and receiving from the

God-Who-is-All, expressed in our actions to community, to children, to society and to our world, is the very Heaven we seek.

To take a final breath with the knowledge that one has overcome the emptiness of desire and the shadow of wealth in the physical world, to have actively taken the action to improve individual contact to the God-Who-is-All, however imperfectly, is entering the gates of Paradise.

To comfort those who believe our passing will lessen themselves is the Love we have always needed. To know that there is a legacy of comfort and improvement in the continual effort to become more, has been within the river of time, is the serenity of joining with the God-Who-is-All, whether praising at the throne or a blissful eternal movement with the force and being that is the God-Who-is-All, is the Reward.

There is one God and, as you read this, you breathe God in and out of your lungs; the saturated God-Who-is-All fills your blood and holds your feet to the ground. The world beyond your door has paths and choices.

Am I on the path to the God-Who-is-All or the path of self?

Am I giving the Love I need to receive so that the Love I need can fill me again to be given away freely?

Am I an instrument or a whirlwind of desire and a scar in the lives of those around me?

Do I create suffering by the fulfillment of my desires?

Do I know that I am living within the body of the one God-Who-is-All?



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